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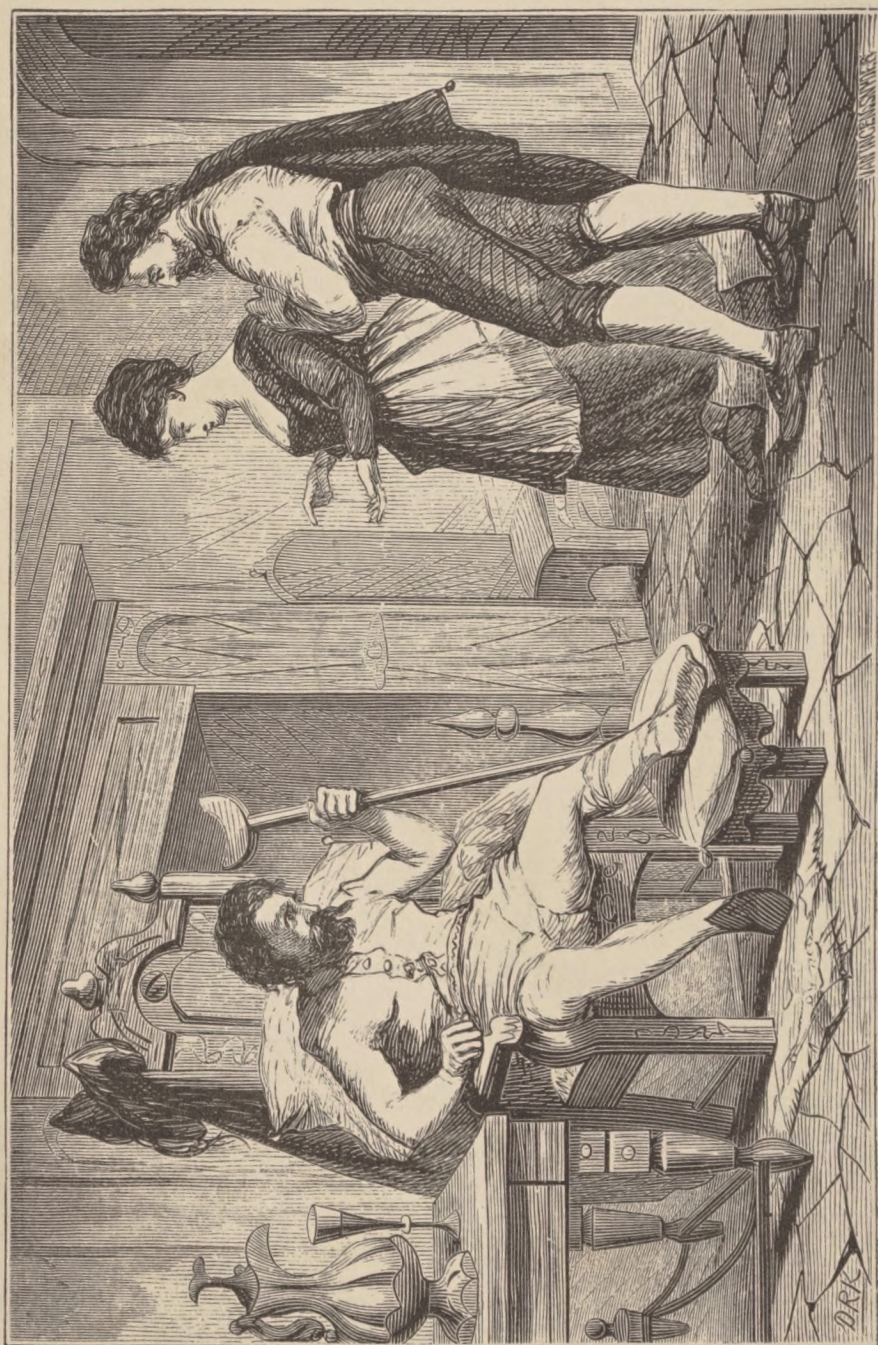
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The Fatherland Series.

Anton the Fisherman.



From the German.

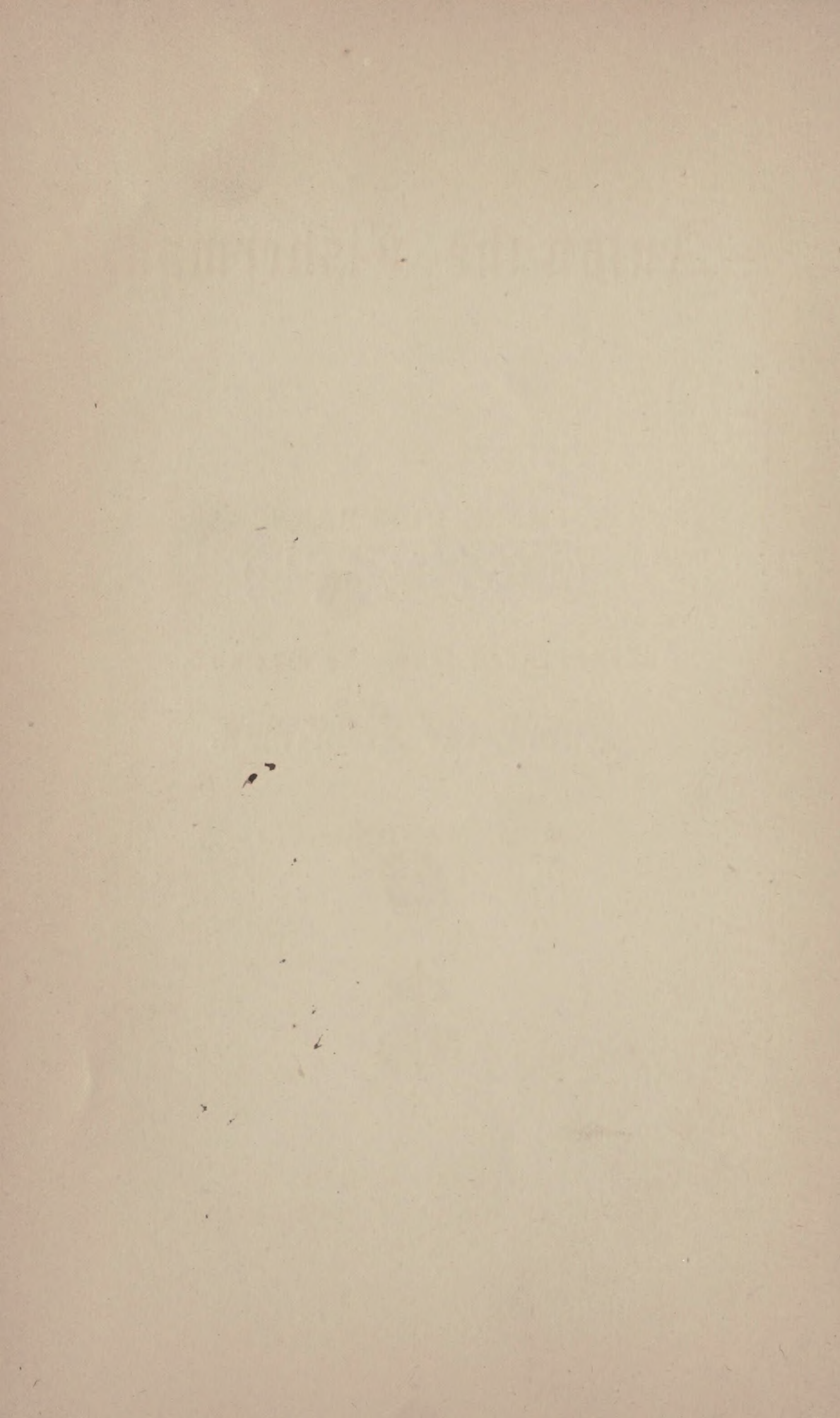
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Anton, the Fisherman.





Anton the Fisherman.

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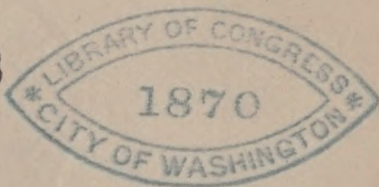
BY

FRANZ HOFFMANN.

Translated from the German,

BY

M. A. MANDERSON.



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ANTON, THE FISHERMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE FISHERMAN'S COTTAGE.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

IN one of the most beautiful portions of Germany, upon the banks of the Rhine, scarcely half a mile distant from the village, but completely hidden from view by sheltering bush and garden, stood a lowly cottage. Far above it, a high hill, covered from base to summit with an undergrowth of green, abruptly reared its head, crowned with a magnificent, stately castle.

How very humble the cottage looked! yet so bright and neat, with its snow-white walls, its windows glistening in the sunshine—so sweet and

graceful, with its clambering roses and mantling vines, which, with their loving tendrils and luxuriant foliage, clothed wall and thatched roof with beauty, that the thought involuntarily arose: "Surely the dwellers of that bright, embowered cottage are good, contented, and happy, although, it may be, poor."

Happiness and content were certainly to be found beneath the roof of the fisherman's cottage; and Poverty, with her evil train, want, penury, and misery, had never passed the threshold. Neither were riches and abundance theirs, but what cared Anton the fisher and his good wife Marie for these? They were content with their cottage, their stall, which sheltered the dear brown-spotted cow, and their two goats, which sported upon the neighboring hills: then, too, twelve motherly hens clucked and scratched in the little farm-yard, or, lustily cackling, proclaimed the fresh-laid egg. But cow, goats, and hens were not the only possessions of Anton. Behind the cottage lay a beautiful large garden;

beyond it, a pretty meadow, fragrant with grass and herbs; and still farther, a good broad range of field-land, where Anton in adverse years raised not only enough corn and potatoes for himself and family, but also for the enclosed inmates of stall and farm-yard, and, when the season was good, sold the surplus for bright, ready money. And besides these, had he not his boat, his nets, and Father Rhine with his fishes? which none knew better than he how to entice. And beyond all, did he not dwell in a wondrously lovely country? one more charming could scarcely be found in all Germany.

Even to dwell in the midst of a charming landscape is in itself a rich possession. Only those are truly forlorn and to be pitied, who, by the force of circumstances, are compelled to exchange such a country for a dreary, desert plain, where the eye sees nothing but continuous heath, sand, dark fir-tree, or sterile field, overshadowed by a heaven of unchanging gray: then the longing soul reverts continually to the lovely, bloom-

ing land, with its sunny, vine-covered hills, its shadowy woods, and the glorious streams in whose clear flow mountain, castle, and town are mirrored.

It was evening. Serenely the sun sank down to his rest, and, as he bade adieu, bathed heaven and earth in a glow of golden light. The air was calm, although one had heard since noon the distant mutterings of thunder, and there lay now upon the far-distant horizon a mantle of dark-gray cloud. Upon a low wooden bench beside the door of the cottage sat Marie, the wife of the fisher, busily cutting the long, green bean-pods which she had just plucked for the morrow's dinner. A clear, sweet voice was heard from out the kitchen window, which stood wide open, singing a simple, touching ballad, well known to all the dwellers upon the banks of the Rhine. Low down toward the shore a stalwart man was mending a boat: it was the fisher, Anton, who was preparing for the business of the following day, which in the early morning would precede the first beams of



the sun. Upon the waters of the Rhine, large sailing-vessels as well as smaller craft float up and down, and occasionally a clear huzza is heard from on board ship or boat, as they pass by the shore where the fisher is at work, which is returned by Anton with a wave of his light cap and an answering shout, as he for a moment suspends his work.

Not far from the cottage a narrow road wound toward the village: it was now quiet, for the vine-dressers had returned to their homes, and only now and then a solitary belated traveller was to be seen, to whom the young wife of the fisher gave a friendly "God greet you, and good night."

"Father might stop working now: he has surely done enough through the day," said Wilhelm, a pretty, rosy-cheeked boy of nine or ten years old, to his mother. "Even old Martin has gone past, who is always the last at his vineyard. Why need father tire himself more than our neighbors in the village?"

“He well knows that it is necessary for him to work, Wilhelm,” answered his mother, smiling, and stroking the glowing cheeks of the boy. “But look: it seems to me as if father had just driven the last nail in the plank, for he has laid the axe aside, and is now wiping the sweat from his brow. Run down quickly, and help him carry his tools!”

The boy sprang up at once, and ran down to his father. Anton threw him aloft, then caught him in his strong arms, pressed him to his breast, and kissed him upon his full red lips.

“Why in such haste, Willie? what news do you bring? are the fish ready, and am I to come to supper?” said he.

“I do not know, father,” answered the boy, amidst the boisterous caresses of the fisher; “but I do know that you could make this a holiday evening, if you would only tell us a story of the olden time—of monsters and dragons, or of Knight Roland, of the great Emperor Karl, or of the horned Siegfried! Pray do, dear father! Annie has been expecting it so long, and mother is

always ready to listen to any beautiful story you have to tell us. Let me carry the axe, father, and the nail-box: they will not be too heavy for me; then you can take the rest of the things, and we will not have to return."

"Now I see why you are in such haste," said his father, smiling and shaking his head. "I fear you will be disappointed, Willie; for see, the sun has gone down, and my boat must be put in order. If I am not greatly mistaken, much rain will fall during the night. So carry the nails, axe, and other tools to the house, and I in the meanwhile will draw the boat higher up on shore."

"But afterward, father — afterward?"

"We will see if sister Louisa can give us time before supper, for you know after that you little ones must go to bed. But mother beckons to us: the fish must be broiled, and we must hasten, or they will be cold."

"Oh! what a shame, that we will not hear a story to-day," lamented Willie while he raised the heavy axe upon his shoulder, and lifted the box

of nails. "But, to-morrow, father — is it not so — to-morrow you will tell us?"

"Should there be nothing of importance to do, my child, I will," said Anton, consolingly. "For to-day we will close our work, and our God be thanked for all his past goodness and mercy. Go on Willie!"

The boy dragged his load up from the shore, and the father bore upon his strong arms and shoulders his boat to the cottage. The shore was not steep, and the ascent to the cottage not difficult, but he was obliged to set it down several times, and rest, before the goal was reached.

"Why are you taking so much trouble, Anton," said his wife. "The boat would be just as safe there as up here: you will only be obliged to carry it down to-morrow."

"That will not be as hard as bringing it up," answered Anton with a smile, giving at the same time his hard, strong hand to his wife. "Do you not know that 'prevention is better than cure'? Father Rhine has his grumblings — hark! there

is heavy thunder: in all probability it will rain; and if the river should rise over night, our boat might be drawn down the stream. Better to guard against than complain, Marie."

"The storm may not prove so dangerous as you anticipate: you are too solicitous, Anton!" said his wife, half reproachfully, half tenderly, her left arm thrown around him, and wiping with the corner of her apron his heated brow. "You work more than there is any necessity for, and are more industrious than any of our neighbors."

"I work because it is a pleasure: is it not for thee and our children? Thou too art always busy, Marie: our little cottage and family consume all thy time; that basket-full of beans is proof of thy industry. Why were men placed in this world, if not to labor? Would you like me, Marie, to exchange with our baron above there? See, his windows even now seem to us down here to gleam like flames of fire. Poor old man! Excess and weariness allow him no true pleasure. Or shall I exchange with his son, the young knight

Ottfried? God forbid! he does not know how to employ usefully one hour of the long day, and he in his youth is still worse off than his father. No, no, God preserve to me that which now is mine—my noble wife, my children, and my health—and I will ‘sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being.’ ”

“Dear Anton,” said his wife, earnestly, “you are so content, you envy no man’s good, and yet your life, from youth up, has been full of trouble and deprivation.”

“Trouble? deprivation?” questioned Anton, in astonishment. “Of what have I been deprived? have I not every blessing that heart could desire? What could one ask more of our Father in heaven, and what should call forth more gratitude, than health and our daily bread?”

“But when you become old and weak, Anton?”

“Have we not our children?” said the fisherman, casting a fond, bright glance upon the little ones, who at that moment came up from the shore

carrying the few remaining tools. "When we are old and weak, will they not be young and strong, and care for us, even as we have cared for them in their helpless childhood? Why should we 'take thought for the morrow'? God has helped us—is now helping us—and he will help us to the end. Have you so little confidence in the Almighty, my wife, that you thus dwell upon past misfortunes and coming evils, while happiness is in our very midst?"

With much emotion Marie pressed the hand of her husband. But now appeared in the door of the cottage a blooming young girl of fourteen or fifteen years, who told them the fish were thoroughly browned and must no longer be over the fire.

"Bring them at once," answered Anton; "my appetite shall do honor to your skill! but bring them out into the open air! why should we be cramped in the narrow room, while God's beautiful world lies spread abroad so gloriously around us?"

“But the table is already set,” answered the maiden, somewhat perplexed; “and while I move it, the fish may burn.”

“Then let the removal be our care,” said Anton, good-humoredly. “Be quick, Marie, we will carry the table out, and Willie and Anna can bring the chairs: be brisk, and in a moment all will be accomplished! The table was soon placed upon a grassy spot near the cottage door, the children brought the chairs, and before Louisa came bearing the delicious broiled fish, everything was in beautiful order. Willie repeated a short prayer, and then the father divided the simple repast—to each an abundance, and to each one did it taste most exquisitely, because provided by the skill and industry of their father. After the frugal meal, the children bade them a cheerful good-night and were taken to their beds by Louisa; after which it was not long until the diligent maiden had restored every plate and bowl to its proper place.

Anton and his wife were once more alone, and

gazed with peaceful hearts out into the beautiful, fragrant, summer landscape. The glow of the evening had vanished, but a soft faint twilight glimmered in the distance, and now the full moon arose, flooding the whole landscape with a mellow, radiant light. A gentle breeze from the river cooled and refreshed them after the sultry day: in the remotest distance the lightning quivered.

A long time had Anton and Marie sat thus silently, communing with their own thoughts, when they were aroused by hasty footsteps, and on the instant Louisa appeared in the clear moonshine, hastening toward the river.

“Where so late, Louisa, my child?” said Anton, as she passed by.

“Only to do some washing and rinsing,” returned the maiden’s clear voice. “The evening is mild and pleasant, and when I rise early in the morning the clothes will all be dry. I have strung the line in the garden.”

And as fleetly as she came, so she vanished; and soon from the river came the sound of splash-

ing water, caused by the exertion of Louisa's energetic arms.

"Noble girl! noble to the very depths of her heart," said Anton, after a pause; "ever busy, ever content, and ever cheering us with her sweet songs. The dear child has surely brought a blessing into our little cottage!"

"Oh! Anton, dear husband," said Marie, in a voice full of emotion, "you bear also this burden I have placed upon you, with patience and kindness; you have, in all these many years, never spoken to her save with words of love; and yet —"

"Well — yet? Speak, Marie," said Anton, as his wife hesitated.

"It is one burden more for you," she said, weeping: "you would not have to labor so severely if Louisa were not with us."

"How so, wife?" returned the fisher, with mild reproof. "Louisa, thy sister's child, a care, a burden for me? she who is constantly adding to our happiness by her cheerfulness and diligence,

who, from early dawn until twilight, is ever as active as now? Have you forgotten how she cared for you, last spring, when you were sick? or, how she watched beside the couch of our little Anna, taking no thought for herself, in that most malignant of fevers? Should she be a burden to me? Now, good wife, what further fancies to-day?"

"Ah! I have been thinking how much freer from care and more fortunate you would have been, Anton, if you had never seen me," said Marie. "When we were married, I did not expect to come empty-handed into thy house; for all thought the school-master of Emmenbach, my dear father, was a wealthy man. Then, when, a few weeks after our marriage, my father died, then it appeared that—ah! I am ever unhappy when I think of that sorrowful day!"

"What appeared then, my dear wife?" asked Anton, while he tenderly stroked her cheeks still wet with tears; "what appeared?"

"Thou knowest, Anton," she continued. "The merchant in Bonn, to whom our father confided

all our little fortune, because he thought him his most faithful friend — when he became a bankrupt, and a fugitive, then we, of all our father possessed, received not even a kreuzer; and so it happened that poor Louisa became a desolate orphan. And finally the baron too denied the debt of five hundred gulden, which my father lent him, one year before his death, in my presence. So thou, poor Anton, instead of bettering thy circumstances by bringing me to thy cottage — thou hast only made them worse; and often, often my heart is heavy, when I think of this.”

She still wept as before. Anton pressed her to his breast, and tenderly kissed her brow.

“My dear wife,” said he, “have you entirely forgotten what a treasure the dear Lord has given me in thee? Dwell not happiness, peace, and tender love beneath the roof of our little cottage? Have I to tell thee again and again that I would not exchange thee and my dear children for all the treasures of the world? No, no, Marie! wealth does not bring happiness: that

is only to be found in a satisfied, contented spirit. Our God has always helped us, and for this let us praise him with all our hearts, and glorify his name forevermore. ‘The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.’ He has blessed our land, and my nets, so that we need not care for the morrow. Why lament over losses we can so easily bear? No more of this, dear wife; we know that they shall all work together for our good. That man in whom your father confided, can he not one day return, and replace all that he, from the pressure of circumstances, could not save from the whirlpool which swallowed him up in its depths. Your father always believed him to be a just man; and when he fled, we knew he was no fraudulent bankrupt. He deserved far more compassion than contempt and hatred. Let us cast no stone upon the fallen.”

“I hate him not: I only grieve that we were involved in his misfortune,” answered Marie. “But the baron! have you excuses for him? he

is rich : is it not shameful that he denies his debt? If we only had that five hundred gulden, we could purchase two acres of field-land, and give no thought to the morrow. No! whatever excuse you may offer, Anton, I despise the baron."

"And I pity him," answered the fisherman, reflectively. "There are many secrets whispered about the old lord, and if he does not pay his debt, may it not rather be because he cannot, than because he will not? 'All is not gold that glitters,' and the baron, in his magnificent castle, is not so light and joyous in mind as are we in our humble cottage. If one could but fathom the heart of man, probing its very depths, ah! there would often be found anguish, trouble, care, and bitterness, in place of the looked-for joy and happiness. Think no more of the baron! Who knows but that he has paid back long ago the five hundred gulden to thy father?"

"No; oh! no," returned the young wife with decision; "a short time before his death he reminded me of the loan; so that I could not for-

get it; and I have no doubt but that he would have shown me the place where he kept the bond, had not death so suddenly overtaken him."

"The bond has vanished; let us think no more about it," said Anton. "I would much rather find out something about the father of our dear Louisa, who has not been heard of for so many years. Did your father never tell you anything about him, Marie?"

"Nothing. He knew not whether he was dead or alive."

"Do you know nothing of his past history, after he became acquainted with your poor sister Anna, and came to your house to live?"

"But very little," answered Marie. "At that time I was but a child, and remember him only as a handsome, stately man, with large, earnest black eyes, and dark curly hair. He was wandering up the Rhine, and came on foot to our house one evening, intending to journey farther; but, instead of doing so, remained with us, not only the next day, but many days and weeks,

under the pretence of learning the German language from father. Afterward he married my poor sister ; then he left us, and never, never returned. My sister, in silent grief, awaited his return, and, after two or three years, God took her to himself. She died in the firm conviction that her husband had passed away, and she would meet him again in heaven. After Anna's death my father never spoke of him, but he loved the little Louisa with his whole heart. He too believed in Oscar's death ; and who could entertain a doubt but that the poor fellow had suddenly been called away. He may have been shipwrecked ; for when he bade us farewell, he said he intended visiting Scotland, his native country. Perhaps he died there of sudden disease, or perished by accident among the mountains of his fatherland : certain it is, however, that through some unavoidable fate he was prevented from returning to us ; for he was good and noble, and loved us even as we loved him."

“And did your father never make any inquiry about him?” said Anton.

“He wrote to Scotland, but his letter returned unopened. Poor man, he could not be traced.”

“Ten or eleven years have passed since then,” said Anton, “no one hearing of him during all that time! Then we must surely, even though with reluctance, give up all hope of his return. I fear that our poor Louisa has indeed but her Father in heaven; and so much the more is it our duty—we who are her nearest relatives—to cherish the desolate orphan. But see! she is returning from the river, and I do not wish her to know we have been speaking of her or her father. The air, too, from the river is cold. Let the past rest, as we too seek rest for the night.”

Soon deep stillness reigned: far in the distance quivered the lightning; the thunder was not distinct, but mingled its low mutterings with the soft murmurs of the Rhine, whose restless waves

ever hastened toward the sea. Within the little cottage all was repose; the tired dwellers slept, after the burden and heat of the day, the soft refreshing sleep of the just.





CHAPTER II.

THE OVERFLOW OF THE RHINE.

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.”

IT was about two or three o'clock in the morning, when the fisherman suddenly awoke from his deep slumber. Half dreaming, he listened. A singular roaring sounded in his ear. It seemed to him as though he sat in his fishing-boat, and the swelling waves beat against the shore. Dense darkness surrounded him, for the moon had long gone down.

“What can it be?” murmured Anton to himself. “Do I dream, or am I awake? Am I in my boat, or in my cottage?” A sudden terror took possession of him. With an effort he sat upright in his bed and cried aloud, “Wake up!

wake up, for God's sake, or we shall all be drowned!"

"What is it, Anton?" cried the bewildered wife, as she was suddenly aroused out of sleep.

"The water! the water!" returned Anton. "The Rhine has overflowed! Hear you not how it pours through every crevice of our cottage? Surely I had a presentiment of this; and for this emergency, by God's good guidance, I brought my boat from the shore. Be tranquil, my dear wife; the danger is not so imminent but that we will be able to escape with but very little trouble. Throw some clothing around the children. I will see, in the mean time, how it looks without." Anton sprang hastily from his bed into the midst of the room. "Alas!" cried he, "it is worse than I thought! The water is already more than ankle deep. It must have stormed fearfully up the Rhine, to have caused such a rise during the night; but I have the tinder, and we shall soon see." The match was applied, and soon a blue flame lighted the little

room, and in a moment the lamp was burning. They soon saw that the floor was covered a foot deep with water, and that it was streaming in rapidly through the crevices of the door.

"We are lost! we are lost!" cried the affrighted mother. "Life—home! all, all will the flood carry away!"

Anton was also alarmed, but through a vigorous exertion regained his self-control. "Be calm, dear wife," he said; "our boat is moored beside the door, and the oars are in it. The water rises rapidly, but time enough remains at least to save our lives. Dress the children, and I will secure the boat."

A complaining bellow, at that moment, as if imploring help, came from out the stall.

"Ah! Anton, our poor cow and goats!" sighed Marie.

"If I cannot save the poor creatures, I will at least set them free," said Anton, decidedly. They may save themselves; but they shall not, without a struggle, miserably perish." Quickly rais-

ing a window, he sprang into the yard. Here the water reached to his waist. He waded through, and succeeded in reaching the stable. The bolt was hastily drawn, and the door thrown wide open. The poor creatures were soon freed, and, impelled by fright, fled through the garden and beyond, disappearing in the mist and darkness of the night. The chickens fluttered, cackling noisily, from tree to tree. Anton left them to their fate, and sorrowfully returned to the cottage.

“Hasten, Marie,” said he; “the water is rising rapidly. Not a moment is to be lost, if we would save our lives. Where is Louisa?”

“I am here, father,” said the child, as she descended the steps which led to the lower floor. She was pale, but calm and self-possessed. Marie too had aroused herself from the stupor of her fright, and cast, with trembling hands, the clothing around the loudly weeping children. Anton addressed them encouragingly, as he searched for his boat near the entrance of the house; for

upon that alone, with the help of God, rested their hopes of safety. The water rushed wildly toward him, so that he could scarcely keep his feet, but, putting forth his whole strength, he forced his way through. A cry of joy escaped his lips when he found the newly repaired boat upon the spot on which he had placed it the preceding evening. The wildly raging flood sought to tear it away, but chain and stake held it firm. With strong arm he pushed the boat close by the door of the cottage, where he secured it by its chain to a post.

“God be thanked, the means of our rescue has not been snatched from us,” said he, as he re-entered the room, in which the water, in the mean time, had risen until it now reached his knees. “Hurry! Marie. Let me take Willie: I will carry him to the boat; then I will come back for Anna and you. Hasten! every moment is precious!” As he spoke, a trunk of a tree or a beam, he knew not which, added force to his words, for, borne by the rushing waves, it thun-

dered like a battering-ram against the walls of the little cottage, and shook it to its foundations. Marie and the children shrieked aloud with fright. Anton heeded not this new danger, but quickly seized his trembling boy and hastened with him to the boat, where he gently placed him, commanding him to remain quiet and composed. Again returning to the little cottage, he was met by Louise, with the little Anna in her arms.

“Brave girl!” cried Anton, taking the little one from her. “Do you get in first, and I will hand you the child. Now for my dear wife, and then away, with God’s help, to the nearest hill.”

When the room was again reached, he found Marie sobbing, as she busied herself in trying to save from the flood such of their goods as lay near at hand. A drawer of her clothes-press stood open, and with trembling hands she drew forth the linen and clothing; but either her bewilderment was too great or her strength was inadequate, for what she grasped fell again from her

powerless hands, and floated about in wild confusion through the water.

“Let be, good wife, let be!” cried Anton; “we have no time to gather the clothing from chest or press; besides, the boat dare not be overladen, if I am to carry her safely through these wildly storming waves.”

“But if our cottage should be torn away,” cried Marie, wringing her hands in her grief—“then is all, yes, all lost!”

“Labor and saving can gather together every thing again,” answered her husband, as he caught her up in his strong arms. “The cottage may bid defiance to the storm, and remain firm: when the water subsides, it will be time enough to look after our trifling goods. But now, before all else, let us try to save our lives: follow me without further delay.”

A second concussion from without struck the cottage: this time it seemed truly to tremble. Marie no longer hesitated: aided by her husband, she left the ravaged room with tears more

bitter than those shed but a few short hours before, and followed him to the boat. Anton quickly lifted her in, sprang after her, and was in the act of unloosening the chain, when a loud cry of grief from his wife restrained him. "What is it, Marie?" he exclaimed, in deadly fright; "has any one fallen out of the boat?"

"No, oh, no!" she answered; "but my Bible! my dear old Bible! the last memento of my dear father, that he intrusted to me only a few moments before his death. Anton, if I lose my Bible, I will never be happy again!"

"Thou shalt have it, Marie!" said Anton, decidedly; "the Holy Book, that has afforded us so many peaceful, blessed hours, it shall not be lost in the waves, if we are saved."

And before Marie's cry of distress could withhold him, he sprang again into the cottage, took the book from the shelf over the door, where it was always kept, and returned to his wife in triumph.

"There, thou hast thy treasure, dear Marie,

and my thanks that thou didst remind me of it," said he. "I would never have forgiven myself if we had come away without our Bible. Now I am satisfied. God's word is with us; what harm can the fierce waves do us? therefore 'will not we fear, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled: the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.' "

Marie pressed closely to her bosom the Holy Book — then laid it in her lap: with her arms thrown around her children she cowered down with them in the boat. Anton now loosed the chain, and seized the oars: scarcely was the work accomplished, when the frail vessel was swept by the wild, raging waters, into the whirlpool with such violence, that the skilled, strong hand of the fisher could scarcely keep her head to the waves. Gradually, to their great joy, the morning dawned. It was comparatively easy, in the increasing light, to avoid those obstacles which threatened destruction to their light craft. Many a beam and timber they encountered, but soon

they reached the open stream, on which the worst they had to dread was the capsizing of their little boat by hidden rocks or sunken trees.

"Can I not help you, father?" asked Louisa, as Anton pushed bravely on, stemming the plunging, roaring waters. "I should like to do something to help you."

"You may, my child, you may," returned her foster-father; "lay hold of the rudder, and press it hard to the right, until the bow of the boat points toward that projection, which this moment the dawn enables us to see: if we reach it we are saved; and with God's help we will reach it."

Louisa at once obeyed these instructions, and turned the rudder as directed. Anton worked with redoubled zeal, and, after a laborious half-hour, the boat grounded upon the longed-for point. Many others had already taken refuge upon this place of security, and eager arms were outstretched to seize the chain which Anton threw toward them, lest the boat be torn away by the dashing, boisterous waves, while he

brought his precious load in safety to shore. When all were safe, the boat was drawn up on land: then Anton shook gratefully the hands of his kind neighbors, who were mostly vine-dressers from out the cottages near the village.

“But, friends, why did you not take refuge in the castle, that was much nearer to you than this hill?”

“It was too late, Anton,” answered Martin, an old farmer; “the flood came with such violence, that the whole village was inundated before we wakened out of sleep. The moat between the village and the castle was full of water; so nothing remained for us but to take refuge here. Our boats, fortunately, were at hand, and the torrent drove us hither, without any exertion on our part. Our lives are saved; but what has become of our homes, and our poor animals, we know not.”

“Hope for the best, neighbors,” said Anton. “The poor creatures have instinct, and will struggle for their lives, even as we have done.

They have certainly been washed somewhere upon land, and, when the water subsides, will return again to their homes. You were better off in the village than I in my little cottage, which lies so near the river. I hardly expect, to-morrow, to find one stone or beam upon another. But let us not dwell upon this. The everlasting God is still ours. He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"Truly, Anton, we all hope, with all our hearts, it may be so for thee," said Martin, pressing warmly the hand of his friend. "A nobler man than thou art cannot be found in all the country round. But hark! what is that? Surely it is the alarm-bell in our village! It may be some unfortunate has remained, whose life is now in danger."

All listened breathlessly for a moment. They hoped old Martin might have been mistaken; but they were soon convinced it was surely the village bell, whose hasty, repeated strokes reverberated over the sounding waters.

A cry of pity broke from them all. "Who can the unhappy one be? If help is not afforded at once, he is lost! Who is it? Who can it be?" cried twenty voices together. "Speak! Jacob."

Jacob was the host of the little inn of the village. "Late yesterday evening," said he, "past ten o'clock, there came a stranger to my inn, who desired a night's lodging. I quartered him in my attic room, because I had no other place to offer; and in the haste of the flight no one remembered the stranger, who apparently is only now conscious of his danger, and has fled to the tower, in order to make known his peril by the alarm-bell, and now calls for help. But who can help him in this flood? Who dare venture to battle with this wild torrent?"

"Let us wait until it is lighter; we can then tell whether your belief is well grounded," said Martin. "The sound of the bell from the castle of the baron can be heard down here."

"That cannot be. The baron is safe, even though the water would rise a hundred yards."

“But could he not ring the bell as a signal that they are threatened with danger? The sound of the alarm-bell reaches far.”

“It is not improbable that the baron should give such a signal,” said Anton; “but I do not think it is so; and the tone of that bell sounds to me like the bell from our village.”

“To me also! to me also!” cried other voices. “It is our bell; and, if Jacob is not mistaken, the stranger must be imploring help. The old church-tower stands upon a weak foundation, and if the water rages around it, it may, at any moment, be overthrown.”

“Yes, yes! the effort must be made to save the man,” said old Martin; “but wait awhile—the sun will soon rise, and then we can see more plainly how to proceed. It is certainly something unusual for the bell to sound so continuously.”

All were silent, and listened again. At that very moment the signal was repeated, and the plaintive, imploring tones, as they wailed over

the rushing, roaring water, made every heart shudder.

At length it was day. The first golden beams of the sun quivered over the wide waste of waters, and glittered clear upon the gilded spire of the village tower. As far as the sight could reach, the whole level plain, on both sides of the river, was covered with troubled, muddy waves, which wildly foamed along, amid trees, houses, and villages. Only some high points projected from the flood—the castle of the baron, and the church-tower, which last even now stood halfway in the water which surrounded it. The tops of the roofs of the more lowly houses could scarcely be seen above the swelling waves.

“It is extraordinary how such an inundation could have occurred,” said old Martin. “There may have been violent showers of rain farther up the Rhine; but a flood so wild as this has never been known in this place within the memory of man.”

“Look there!” interrupted Anton, pointing

up the stream. "Do you not see — there, where the river foams like a cataract? The dam has broken at that place, and has brought upon us all this trouble."

All eyes were turned toward the designated spot. Anton had seen aright. About a mile from the hill on which they stood was distinctly visible a broad breach in the dyke, and the cause of the sudden, mighty inundation was at once made plain to all.

"It must have been a faulty place," said old Martin. "It is bad enough that we have been surprised; but we may hope, as the waters have come so inconceivably quick, that they will also as quickly subside. But what has happened to the stranger? I no longer hear the bell!"

The attention of all, which for some moments had been diverted, turned again toward the tower.

"I see something white waving from out the tower window!" cried several voices.

"There is no longer any doubt: there is a

man in the tower," said Martin. "He rang the bell while it was dark, as a signal, and now that it is light, he waves his handkerchief. He must be helped, and that right quickly. The poor fellow is in great danger, and the risk increases every moment. Before we can plan his escape, the tower may be swept away by the thundering waves; and then God be merciful to the doomed one. Up, men! Here are boats in plenty! Jump in, and forward, in God's name!"

Deep silence followed the call of the old man. With sullen, undecided countenances, the men gazed upon the foaming, whirling flood, which bore away upon its angry surface uprooted trees, old timbers, and many a household treasure — measuring, as they looked, the distance from their safe refuge to the church-tower, from which the signal fluttered.

"It is impossible," a timid voice now answered, after a long pause. "Only look, father Martin, we must steer against the current, and the waves

rush so rapidly toward us that breath and strength would soon be lost."

"And the timbers and rafters," said another. "A collision with one of these would crush our boats to atoms: it is not possible. Shall we place our own lives in jeopardy to save the life of one whom none of us knows—who does not even belong to our village? I, for one, will not do it: I will not."

"Neither will I!" "Nor I!" muttered several others, "to save a stranger, lose our own lives: no! no!"

"Then, too," said one, in the midst of the group, "the tower still stands, and who knows that it will not stand until the water subsides? The flood cannot last long, as you yourself have said, father Martin!"

"But the mortal terror of the wretched man: do you count that as nothing? Shame upon you to delay, when, it might be, you could rescue a fellow-man. I tell you again, the foundation of our tower is weak; you all know that even during

this year it has given way; and no one can doubt but that it will fall before two hours elapse, if the water rages around it that long; and none of you think the water will subside in that length of time. Before evening it will scarcely lower enough to admit of crossing without swimming."

"True, Martin; but look at the timbers — the trunks of trees — the depth you cannot reckon; and then ask yourself if it is possible to get there alive! Not one of us will even dare to make the attempt."

"I will dare it," now said fisher Anton, who had hitherto been silent, but with watchful eye had noted every eddy and current. "See there, men! We must drive down stream a short distance, until we reach that point, where the river makes a sharp bend; thence we will cut across the stream, and reach yon channel, which lies smooth as a mirror, between the foaming currents on each side. Then, putting forth all our strength, we will row up stream, until we can alter our course,

and, without much more trouble, we can gain the tower, take the stranger on board, and our return will be an easy matter, for we will drive with the stream, and, by the clear light of day, every obstacle will easily be avoided. Courage, friends! give me one pair of strong arms, beside my own, and I will dare it."

"Bravo!" said Martin; "not a braver heart beats than thine: I repeat it; and thou art right: in this way it is possible to struggle against stream, and reach the tower: nothing is needed but a steady hand and a sure eye. Now, then, men! which among you shall it be to go with our brave Anton to the rescue?"

The men were still silent. "We have lost enough already," muttered at last a growling voice. "Who will assure us that our lives will not be lost in this venture? I will not go."

"Nor will I, not for the whole world," said another, as they stubbornly turned away, with angry, lowering looks, and not a word more would they utter.

“Well then, in God’s name, I will try it alone!” said Anton. “It grieves me deeply to see how desperately the poor man implores our aid. And he shall at least have the comfort of knowing that some one attempted his rescue! If no one will accompany me, I go alone!”

“Ah, Anton! think of thy children,” sobbed Marie, with anguish, as she clung to her husband. “If thou shouldst drown, Anton, they will be fatherless.”

“They will have a Father in heaven!” whispered Anton, softly. “Weep not, dear wife! let me go! it will infuse strength into these arms if you consent to this good work! Reflect, Marie, that poor, forsaken man may, too, be a father, whose death would cause his children to weep hot, bitter tears. Suppose I stood there, my wife, and prayed in my anguish for succor, and implored help with the tones of that bell, and no one, no one listened to me, or had pity upon me — how then, Marie? how then? No, let me go, dear wife! My heart will not passively

suffer me to consent to a death which I may prevent."

"Go!" said Marie, and a noble expression animated her countenance; "go, and the Almighty God go with thee! Has He not said, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.'"

Tenderly Anton pressed his brave wife to his breast, hastened resolutely to his boat, and by a single effort of his stalwart arm launched it upon the stream.

"Will no one," he cried, at the last moment, "will no one help me?"

Not a word of reply: the old man shook his gray head sorrowfully. "If I would not be more a burden than a help to you," said he with grief, "I would not see you go alone. But this arm is weak: it can no longer wield the oar or steer the boat."

"But mine can: I have proved it, father!" cried a clear, soft, childish voice," and Louisa, the fos-

ter-daughter of Anton, rushed forward, and, with cheeks glowing with enthusiasm, leaped into the boat, and took her place at the helm. "Row, father, row," she said; "we two are enough to force this light boat through the rapids."

"Well then, 'GOD WITH US!'" said Anton, after he had waited a short time, to see if shame would not drive one or the other of the men to take Louisa's place. A vain hope!

"On, then, my brave girl! we will venture, and rely upon the protection of Heaven. Farewell, Marie! farewell, my children! Soon, I hope, you will see us return in safety. Another effort, and the boat was fairly started.

Anton sprang in, and seized the oar: quickly the little craft was driven by the torrent down stream.

With mingled emotions the bystanders gazed after the boat. In many a heart shame was busy, but all joined heartily in the wish that the noble deed of the brave fisher should be crowned with success. Marie, white and trembling, sank upon

her knees, beseeching God for the safety of her husband: her children, kneeling at her side, prayed with her. Old Martin, deeply moved, laid his hands in blessing upon the bowed heads of the little ones.

“Be comforted,” said he; “God is with your father; his Almighty power will make a path for him, and the waves will be powerless to destroy.”

Truly, it seemed as though all the wishes and prayers for the success of Anton had prevailed, for quickly and securely the light boat flew over the foaming billows to the spot where he must make the expected turn, in order to gain the quiet water.

“This is the place, Louisa,” said he: “quick! round the helm! so! And now—Heaven is with us!”

The boat had turned, and was in the midst of the weakest current: however it was always strong enough to make it necessary for Anton to exert himself to the utmost, and in a few moments the

clear drops of sweat rolled down his forehead. Louisa saw them, and made a quick resolve.

Unloosening her apron, she with it lashed the rudder fast, so that it could not move out of its place.

“What are you doing, my child?” asked Anton; “why lash the rudder?”

“So that I can have my arms free to help thee, father!” answered Louisa. “We must now tend, by degrees, a long distance up stream; and it is better that I take the oar, and let the helm be as it is: when we have to turn, I can unbind it in a moment!”

With these words, she took the oar, and dipped it in the water. She was not unaccustomed to manage a boat: frequently had she used the oar, sometimes for pleasure, and sometimes to assist her foster-father in his business as a fisher: her help at this moment was most opportune; the boat glided quickly through the current, and Anton needed no longer to labor to exhaustion.

“We will succeed! we will surely succeed, my girl,” said he; “in a little while, only one short quarter of an hour, and we will reach the point, where we will turn, and again drive with the current; then will we be opposite the tower, where the foam rears itself like a crest; then the worst difficulties will have been overcome. Only a quarter of an hour, my child!”

“I can hold out, father,” answered the maiden, courageously, and with flashing eye; “I am not at all tired, and the nearer we approach our goal the more spiritedly I can work.” On and still on she guided the little craft, avoiding with consummate skill the numerous obstacles they encountered, and animated with fresh courage when the path lay free before her. At length the point was reached where they could again turn, and drive with the current. They both breathed more freely—the severest labor was over—all that remained to be done was to them but child’s play.

A moment more and the tower was gained,



and the boat moored close by one of the windows of the old tower.

The stranger, a stately man, with a dark bronzed countenance, large earnest black eyes, heavy beard, and of distinguished bearing, stood in the arched window, and stretched both arms toward his rescuers.

"Thank you, thank you, my brave man, my noble maiden!" called he in a deep rich voice, but with a slightly foreign accent. "You have come most opportunely, for the tower sways even now under my feet, and threatens every moment to fall, and bury me in its ruins."

"Truly, truly, here it stands no longer firm," answered Anton; "and therefore delay not, but jump quickly into the boat, so that we can at once leave this dangerous neighborhood. Take my hand, now—sure and steady; soon will we find ourselves safe on shore."

The stranger leaped into the boat, and sat down, as he took the oar out of Louisa's hand.

"You have done enough for me, dear child,"

said he; "now suffer me to do some little toward my own rescue. I know how to use an oar, and if I only could have had a boat, I would not have been in the perilous situation from which you have so nobly delivered me." The boat, with a new impulse, darted into the midst of the wild waters.

The light boat flew along, and soon again reached the point where many anxious hearts awaited their return, with faint hope and ardent longing.

Anton sprang upon shore, and pressed his wife and children to his bosom, who wept for joy, amidst the loud congratulations of those surrounding them. Louisa especially was the object of their commendation and praise. The stranger, standing close by, gazed with emotion upon the young girl, without whose resolute courage his rescue would have been almost impossible.

"Wonderful, this resemblance!" murmured he to himself. "So must *she* have looked in her

youth.—What is your name, my child?" he said, suddenly turning to Louisa, who blushingly listened to the praises of old Martin and the rest of the villagers.

"Louisa," she answered; "and this is my good father, Anton, the fisher.

The stranger softly sighed, and drew his hand over his brow, as if he could by so doing wipe away some painful reminiscences.

"I will remember thee, dear maiden, thee and thy father: now I can do no more than offer thee my hearty thanks for thy timely succor."

"And that is needless, dear sir," said the fisherman, who had heard the words of the stranger. "What we did was our duty, and the satisfaction of your rescue is reward enough for that short exertion. But see! truly we were barely in time; the old tower sways more and more: there! it has gone! the water has spared the mason the trouble of carrying it away."

At that moment, as all gazed intently, the

spire bowed itself, and suddenly the whole old, decayed structure fell a mass of ruins, and disappeared beneath the foaming waves.

For some moments deep silence reigned over the group; then suddenly there resounded a loud cheer for Anton, and ten or twelve rough hands were outstretched to grasp his. The noble deed increased in value when it became apparent how pressing the necessity had been. The stranger, when the agitation was somewhat allayed, drew Anton's arm within his own, and led him a little to one side.

"My friend," said he, "you have now been convinced that I have you and your noble daughter to thank for my life. Without your immediate, manful help, I would now be lying under those ruins, in a watery grave, and death would never have been to me more unwelcome than just now, when —" The stranger checked himself, muttering, "But it is not yet time!" and then resumed, "I pray you, friend, answer me honestly one question — will you?"

"Right willingly, dear sir, if it will give you any pleasure," answered the fisherman, smilingly.

"Well, then, you have a wife and children. Are your circumstances such that it is easy for you to maintain them?"

Anton bowed his head, and a dark shadow clouded his brow. "Yes, it *was* easy," said he, in a suppressed voice. "I had a cottage, garden, field, and cattle; but this wild flood has carried all away. I know not if even the walls of my house still stand. I know not if my small piece of ground is not so laid waste that years may pass before it again bear fruit. Nevertheless," added he, confidently, "the Everlasting God is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He has helped us in the past, and he will help us in the days to come. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?' Yes, I will hope in God; I will praise him for the help of his countenance. These arms have not lost their strength; they must labor, so that

my dear ones shall not want their daily bread. Then there is still my boat. The nets have been washed away, but a little patience will soon remedy that. Yes, yes, dear sir, he who works, trusting in the Lord, will always find enough to maintain him."

"Spoken like a noble, upright man!" said the stranger, as he pressed Anton's hand. "We will speak of this again. For the present, I have saved no more than you out of the flood—merely my life. If I come into possession again of my portmanteau, which is buckled behind my saddle—but we must wait. In the mean time, I cannot remain here until the waters subside, for urgent business obliges me to proceed. I will see you again, my friend. But now tell me your name. They call you here the fisher Anton; but that cannot be your whole name."

"No; it is because there is more than one Anton in the village, that they call me after my occupation. My proper name is Anton Steinbach."

“Thank you for the information,” said the stranger, at the same time writing upon his tablets, which he drew out of the breast-pocket of his coat. “And what will you do, if your worst conjectures are realized, and you find your farm desolated?”

“I cannot now say with certainty,” answered Anton: “it will depend upon circumstances. I may have to carry on some other branch of industry: in that case I may be obliged to go far from our village.”

“Remain in this place, and I will know where to find you again when the right time comes. For the present, farewell. Heaven protect thee and thine, my brave deliverer! Share with me the little I have in my purse. There are two gold-pieces — one for thee, and one for me. No refusal, man! I cannot do more at this time. Bonn lies not far from here, and there sufficient resources await me. But necessarily some time must elapse while you seek and obtain work: you may need a little money. No denial!

take it! I will now speak a few words with my host, whom I see among these men."

Forcing the gold-piece into Anton's hand, he left him suddenly. For a few moments he spoke in an undertone to the host, courteously greeted once more his rescuers, and with hasty steps soon disappeared. Anton followed him with his eye until the nearest hill concealed him from his gaze.

"I should also have asked him *his* name," murmured he to himself.

"Certainly, Anton; certainly, that you should have done!" returned his wife. "I did not think but that you had, or I would certainly have done it."

"Why would you, Marie?" asked Anton, no little astonished at the apparent agitation of his wife. "What more have we to do with the stranger? I brought him here from the tower, and he paid me a good fare—a bright gold-piece. See here, Marie! He and I are now square."

"But I am much disappointed that you did not ask his name and country," returned his wife. "I cannot tell what there was about the stranger, but I could not remove my eyes from him; and the longer I gazed, the deeper grew the impression that I had seen him a long time ago."

"That certainly is not improbable, Marie, and not in the least remarkable," said Anton. "Many strangers visit the Rhine every summer, and among many others it is not impossible that you have seen him."

"That is not it; no, no!" answered Marie, musingly; "it lies deeper. Even the tones of his voice were familiar. I must have seen him under circumstances that were of more moment than a fleeting meeting."

"Perhaps some resemblance has struck you," said her husband, lightly: "that often occurs. For my part, I am convinced he is unknown to me. I certainly would have recognized him, if I had ever seen him before. No, no, Marie;

that is foolish and visionary. If you so much desire to know his name, we will ask the host: he knows it, perhaps, as he lodged with him yesterday."

"Yes; that is possible," cried Marie, with deep earnestness. "Ask him, Anton."

The question was asked, but the host had no information to give.

"The gentleman came late last night," said he. "Who would at such an hour ask for a name? I was not at all uneasy about him, for he rode a most beautiful horse, with a full round portmanteau buckled on behind. The horse was hardly in the stable until the stranger sought repose, neither of us dreaming we would be so suddenly aroused from sleep."

"But he spoke with you," said Anton. "Did you discover nothing, Herr Wirth?"

"Nothing whatever about himself; he only charged me to take care of his portmanteau, if it be found. The clothing, methinks, will be well soaked. Now on the other hand, Anton:

he asked after you, and your means of subsistence. I gave him a fair account, you may believe me."

"I do not doubt it. Did he say nothing more about where he has now gone?"

"Yes; he asked how far it was to Emmenbach and Bonn—which latter place he wished to reach before night—and I gave him the desired information."

"What does he intend to do in Emmenbach, Herr Wirth?" questioned Marie, hastily. "Did he not mention that?"

"Not a word. The way to Bonn lies through that place, and perhaps he wishes to hire a conveyance there, so that he will not have so far to walk. The gentleman has something distinguished about him, and does not look to me as if he were very much accustomed to travelling about on foot."

"Yes, that can easily be seen," said Marie, with the keenest disappointment; "but I wish I had learned who he is—his name, whence

he comes — and what he intends doing in Emmenbach.”

“I never gave you credit for so much curiosity before, good frau,” said the host, smiling. “It may be still possible that you learn all you desire; the gentleman told me he designed to return as soon as his business permitted, and I feel sure he will, if it is only to look after his portmanteau. But that is not all, I think, that will bring him back: a word escaped him of —”

“Of what, Herr Wirth? do tell me,” begged Marie.

“Well, if you do not speak of it again, little woman,” whispered the host, softly. “He asked me about the castle of our baron of Windheim, if it were true that he had resolved to sell his estate. You know, perhaps, that it has this long time been whispered about, and there may be some truth in it. I told the stranger so — for all is not right in the castle, above there. The old lord has wasted a great deal of money, and the young knight, I fear, much more. Gold and

silver must sometimes be very scarce in the chest of his grace. But why let that trouble us? we surely have enough cares of our own. God only grant that no greater damage has been done by the inundation than we now fear."

"And you really think that the stranger wishes to purchase the baron's estate?" asked Marie.

"It might be; yes—it might be; and it might not," answered the host, shrugging his shoulders. "He confided nothing further to me; we can only conjecture. Why did he come to our village? and why did he inquire so particularly about the castle? I much more believe he will purchase than that he will not."

"Then I must certainly have been mistaken," said Marie to herself; "so rich a man as that cannot be a friend or relative of mine. It has all passed, Anton; ask no further: I now see it was all a delusion. Let us look after the children, and decide what we will do: we cannot remain here until the water subsides, and we must seek

quarters for the coming night, on account of the little ones."

"Yes, I have thought of that," answered Anton. "You know, Marie, our old Aunt Dorothy, who lives on the other side of the castle: she would take us into her little cottage for a night or two, and by that time we can determine what to do, and may find another shelter. Come, good wife, there is nothing to be done here. I will secure the boat, so that it will not be carried away by the flood."

"Go, Anton!" cried several voices; "we will see that your boat is safe; go and find a shelter for your children."

Anton gratefully accepted their kind offer. Taking his youngest child in his arms, and followed by Marie and the two children, carrying the Bible and the few effects they had saved from the flood, he bent his steps toward the cottage of his old aunt; which, although it lay but a short distance beyond the castle, was safe from the ravages of the inundation.

The place of refuge was soon reached, and heartily were the poor fugitives welcomed.

The good old aunt opened to them her door and heart, inviting them to remain under her humble roof until they could again return to their cottage, or till another suitable shelter could be provided.

“God has, of his mercy, raised us up a friend for our time of need,” said Marie, encouragingly, to her dear ones. “We will always meet with the good and kind. We must not despond, if the storm of adversity beat upon us a little too roughly. God will help those who put their trust in him.”

They were soon established in the little room—small enough at any time; but a place was found for each, Anton preparing for the night by spreading upon the floor a soft bed of fragrant hay, upon which they laid them down and slept as sweetly as in their own little cottage upon the banks of the Rhine.



CHAPTER III.

THE HUT IN THE FOREST.

“In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.”

TWO full days passed before the flood had so far subsided as to allow of Anton's return to the cottage. On the morning of the third day, he determined upon the sorrowful undertaking. Marie would have accompanied him, but Anton forbade it, fearing her heart and courage would be too severely tried by witnessing the ruin and devastation he naturally apprehended after the events of the past two or three days. He acted wisely, for the sight that awaited him was not calculated to inspire hope or cheerfulness.

The walls of his old home. it is true, still

stood, but the water, pouring through the open doors and windows, had utterly destroyed everything that had not been washed away by the waves. A large rafter, which projected some two yards from the window, had crushed the press in which Marie kept her linen and clothing, and of all its contents only a single piece lay floating around in the mud and water. The beds, chairs, tables Anton sought for in vain — even his nets, with other fishing implements, had disappeared, and lay either at the bottom of the river, or were carried far away by the waves. The floor of both room and chamber was covered inches deep with an adhesive mass of mire and sand. The mortar had fallen from the walls, leaving them in such a damaged condition that they were entirely beyond repair. It was plain that they would have to be torn down, and the little cottage rebuilt from its very foundation, if they would again dwell in this devastated spot.

Sighing deeply, Anton turned to examine the

yard, stable, and fields, passing, as he did so, through the doorless room. A sorrowful sight here presented itself: the stable had vanished, and the garden and land looked so wasted, that for this year, and perhaps the next, a harvest could not be counted upon. The rich, fertile earth was washed away, and in its place lay sterile sand and gravel, like that within the cottage. Only the two fruit-trees were standing, their trunks visible, but entirely stripped of their branches. Anton sorrowfully shook his head:

“There is but little left, and that little almost worthless. But a few days since I was a fortunate man — to-day, bereft of all; and the assistance of our neighbors not to be relied upon, for they are but little better off than we ourselves.” For some time he remained standing, plunged in the sad reflections which the scene excited. “But lamenting will not help us,” said he, at length; “we must act. Happily, the dear Lord has not taken away my courage and health.

We must only apply ourselves more zealously than ever, laboring somewhere, honestly, until all this damage is repaired." So, stooping down at once, he gathered together the trifling goods left to him by the inundation, made of them a bundle, and, placing it upon his shoulder, left his desolate cottage to return to his wife and children.

"Ah! my husband, is that all that is left to us of our little home?" cried Marie, sadly, as Anton approached.

"Almost all," he returned, "excepting, perhaps, a few rafters, posts, and bars, that we will be able to make some use of again. All else has been carried away by the flood."

"Then, Anton, we have no time to lose. We must rouse ourselves, and at once decide what we can do to earn our daily bread. What shall we do, Anton?"

"I must go away somewhere, and labor by the day," said her husband. "I see nothing else for me to do." And in few words he described,

with an aching heart, the ravages he had witnessed in cottage, garden, and field.

"I had not pictured it to myself half so bad," said poor Marie, wiping away the bitter tears which sprang, unbidden, to her eyes. "But, Anton, while you were away I have had a visit, from which I believe good results will follow."

"Who was the visitor?" said Anton.

"Frederick, the baron's huntsman — my cousin, you know, upon my mother's side."

"Frederick! What can he do for us, Marie? He has not much; and only recently he was complaining that he could not even get what was due him. We cannot expect any help from him, however much he may wish to render it."

"He can give nothing," said Marie, "but he will make thee a proposal. He will soon return, for he promised to do so. Only do thou listen to him, Anton."

It was not long before Frederick made his appearance — a slender young fellow, of a pleasant countenance, dressed in a neat huntsman's

uniform, with rifle, hunting-pouch, and knife. Reaching his hand to Anton, he said: "The water has driven you from your home, cousin. I was truly grieved to hear of it, and would have called yesterday to express my sympathy, had I not been obliged to accompany the young knight to the forest. It happened very well, however, for I think through it something good may result to you."

"What is it, cousin?" asked Anton. "Marie has alluded to it, but I cannot imagine what you mean."

"See," said Frederick, ingenuously, "your house and field is so laid waste that you can no longer dwell there; I have seen it myself. Your fishing, necessarily, will have to be suspended for a good while; and, indeed, it alone would not support your family: besides, all your fishing implements are lost—all but the boat, which will not be of much service without your tackle. Now listen to me patiently, cousin: within the forest lies a hut, in which, a long time ago, a

herdsman dwelt. He was an old retainer of the father of our present lord, who ordered that he should live in it until his death. That is at least ten or twelve years ago : so you may know the hut is no longer in good repair ; for during all this time, no one has ever even driven into it a nail ; but, with all that, it is not in such a bad condition but that in a short time, with a little trouble, it could be rendered at least habitable."

"You mean well, Frederick," said Anton ; "but have you thought, a shelter is not all that we need ?

"Certainly," returned the young huntsman. "The old Balthazar had a piece of woodland around his hut, in good condition ; the trees were rooted out, and he used the spade so skilfully that he had enough fruit and vegetables to supply all his wants. To be sure, since his death, the weeds have obtained the upper hand, and the undergrowth has again sprung up ; but if you attack them vigorously, you can soon clear a path, and the soil of the woods is so rich that it

will bring you, certainly, three or four harvests without the expense of fertilizing it."

"It is still somewhat early in the year," said Anton, thoughtfully, after a short pause. "If one would apply himself to it, it might be that, before winter, a harvest could be reaped! You have a kind heart, Frederick! Yes, I will take it at once; that is, if the baron has no objection. You know he is not noted for his kindness to the poor. Have you spoken to him about it?"

Frederick at this question exhibited some little embarrassment, as he cast his eyes to the ground.

"Yes, certainly," he replied. "And this is the only unpleasant part of the business. The baron has not the slightest objection that you take possession of the cottage, and cultivate the ground; but he wishes you to understand that he gives away nothing; and if he does anything for your advantage, he expects you to render service in turn."

"Ah, ha! I thought so," said Anton. "I know

the young knight: he has not been friendly to me for some time — not since I refused to leave my fish at the castle without the pay. Well, I see that nothing will come of the wood-hut. But I thank you for your kindness, cousin. Yes, yes, your proposition seemed for a time to me to be very pleasant; but we certainly have been reckoning without counting the cost.”

“Not so hasty, dear husband!” said Marie, gently. “Will you not listen to what the baron requires of you?”

“Only that which I would not be willing to perform,” said Anton. “I know the young knight. The hut is not worth anything to him; but I must pay dear for it: I am to repair it, and cultivate the ground, and after that to be put out.”

“Not so, Anton,” returned the huntsman. “Listen to me, and after that you can do just as you please. The baron requires nothing of you but the tenth of your harvest, and that you

occasionally render service at the chase during the winter."

"The tenth, and, besides that, service!" said Anton, shaking his head. "Either is too much, Frederick. The tenth I would be willing to give; although it is hard—for I must, before I reap, prepare the ground; but service—shall I voluntarily place myself in servitude? No, Frederick, that is much, too much to require! Rather would I work by the day and eat dry bread, and remain a free man."

The young huntsman shrugged his shoulders, saying, "I have nothing more to say; you are not obliged to accept his offer; but I do think it would be to your advantage to try him: it will not last forever; and when you see the progress of your work, day by day, even if they exact too much of you—I would still advise you—I repeat it, to accept the offer, Anton. You can always get work, even if the contract with the baron does not last. What does it matter if some trifling service be required? There are not more

than three or four hunts during the winter ; and in case of necessity, I can render you the help required, or get some one to take your place. I would venture, Anton !”

“Yes, yes, husband, Frederick reasons well, and advisedly,” said Marie, as the fisherman shook his head doubtfully. “Think Anton, aunt has given us a shelter for a few days, out of charity and love for us, her relatives, but she cannot always keep us in her little cottage, where there is hardly room enough for one. Let us go, dear Anton, to the wood-hut : Louisa and I will help you make, and cut, and dig, until everything is in order ; then, while the seed lies in the earth, you can go out to labor by the day, or still carry on your old business during the winter : the dear God has always helped us, and would now help us through, cousin Frederick. Only take the cottage, Anton, and all else can then be decided upon. Knowest thou,” she whispered softly, bending down toward her husband, “in the worst case, if the baron treats thee ill, or is unreasonable, we

will remind him of the five hundred gulden which he borrowed from father, and threaten him with a complaint before the justice: that was not done before, when he denied the debt. Then he will be likely to withdraw any unreasonable demand, and will not be too hard upon thee. No, dear husband, do not refuse the offer, but take the hut without any further hesitation: do not vex our cousin so much, by not availing yourself of his kindness."

Notwithstanding all this persuasion, Anton was still undecided. "You know not what I know," said he; "I have always kept silence, so as to spare you unnecessary pain and anxiety: the young knight does not like me, and would have made me suffer before this, if I had only been in his power. So long as I sat in my own house, he could do me no harm, and I cared but little for his ill-will; but circumstances would be wholly changed if I took his wood-hut on lease: from the very outset he has shown his bitter feeling toward me, by requiring not only the tenth of the

harvest, but also service. At my first misstep, he will surely, surely lay his hand heavily upon my shoulder, and press me down into the dust, if he dare."

"But he dare not," answered Marie quickly. "What can he do to thee? Frederick is right when he says you can at any hour leave the hut, if you do not choose to remain. And what has happened with the young baron? perhaps it is not so bad as you imagine, Anton."

"Bad enough, at all events, if I am in his power," answered Anton. "It was last autumn: they had taken fish of me at the castle, the whole of the previous summer, but never thought of paying me, so that at last I concluded it was time to remind them of it, and went myself up to the castle, with my basket. In the court-yard I met the young knight, who ordered me to come near, and let him see what I had brought. It was a salmon-trout, of over ten pounds' weight—one of the most beautiful I had ever caught in my net. His grace would at once have taken pos-

session of it, telling me to carry it to the kitchen ; but I said, ‘Do not, I pray you, take it amiss, sir knight: right willingly will I give you the trout; but might I ask you to mention to the steward that I have not yet been paid for the fish I brought since last spring.’ I spoke respectfully, and modestly, but the young lord abused me fiercely, wrath flaming in his face.

“‘Shameless fellow!’ he shouted, cracking his riding-whip about my face, ‘into the kitchen with you, and do not dare to come before me so boldly again: if the steward owes you, he will pay you when your turn comes.’

“‘It has been a long time now, my lord,’ I answered, ‘and I am only a poor fisherman, and have children, who need their daily bread. I must again pray you not to send me away without some money, for I need it sorely.’

“The young baron cast upon me a scowling look, and threatened me in these words: ‘We will see how it will be!’ I thought that was my answer, and took up my basket to go—of course

not into the kitchen — what should I do there? Money I was sure not to get — of that I was fully persuaded. To give up the beautiful trout, for which any host in Bonn would willingly have given me three or four gulden — that I would not do. Past the kitchen, and almost through the gateway, had I gone, when the young knight passionately asked where I was going, and if I did not know where the kitchen was.

“‘Yes,’ I returned, ‘but I have nothing to do there, Herr Baron.’

“‘The trout must be left,’ shouted he; ‘I have bought it.’

“‘Yes, my lord, but you have not paid for it, nor for the fish of the past summer, and I need the money. I pray you, do not take offence, but the trout I must carry to Bonn!’

“Then he was full of wrath, ordered me fiercely to go in, saying the trout was his, that I had offered it to him, and that he had accepted it — that I dare not sell it to any one else — if I had forgotten before whom I stood, with many other

such expressions. But as I remained calm, and not in the least intimidated, still pursuing my way, he called after me: 'Beware! you will one day repent of your audacity; that salmon-trout shall be a bitter morsel for you, for the rest of your life.' What he still further shouted I know not, for I hurried away, glad enough when I reached the foot of the crag, and heard him no more. Since that time all friendliness between us is at an end: the selfsame day he sent me my money, but with the command that I should not dare to come to the castle again; and whenever we have chanced to meet since, he looks at me scowlingly, so that I well know he has not forgotten the salmon-trout and my refusal: and now, can I believe he feels differently toward me? that I cannot!"

"I had not known of this — not an intimation had I of it," said his wife, after a short silence, as she bent her eyes thoughtfully to the ground, while Frederick had not another word to utter.

"But, Anton, circumstances alter cases," said

Marie, at length. "So long as you were fortunate, it might be that the young lord wished you harm ; but now that we are stripped of all our resources, surely he will not suffer himself to indulge bitter feelings toward thee on account of a poor miserable fish. It is not possible that he can be so malicious. And then you must remember the baron did not think of this himself, in order to entice you into the hut ; but Frederick spoke to him first about it, requesting that he would allow you to live there. His giving consent does not look to me like hate or enmity."

"Neither does it seem so to me, cousin ; certainly not," said the young huntsman, somewhat reassured. "The young lord, I am confident, is not so vindictive. I am, even after all this, of the same opinion. I would take the cottage."

Anton shook his head again and again. "I trust him not, I trust him not!" he reflected. "Do not urge me further, children. I will think about it, and give you an answer to-morrow."

The subject was not further discussed. Frederick bade them farewell, and was followed by Anton, under the pretext of looking at the wood-hut; but he well knew that would be altogether useless, and wended his way to the village, asking among one and another of the prosperous farmers if they could give him work for a year, or even for six months; but his applications were unsuccessful. With a heavy heart he set out upon his return — when suddenly he stood still, and, after a short but severe internal struggle, made a quick resolve:

“If I had only been so fortunate as to have obtained work!” thought he. “I would rather have worked my fingers to the bone than have been dependent upon the baron; but it cannot be! there seems to be nothing else left for me to do; so I will go and at least look at the wood-hut.”

With hasty steps he turned in the direction of the forest. From Frederick’s description he knew where the cottage lay, and soon arrived at

the spot. He examined the hut with much interest. It was constructed of unhewn logs, and rudely roofed with thatch. The windows and doors appeared to be in good condition; only the roof was damaged here and there a little, during all this lapse of time.

“A few bundles of reeds will help that,” he thought. “What is left of the house is not bad, and after all — but, first, I will look about a little.” Observing closely the surroundings, he soon saw that there were two or three acres of land, in such a condition that, before a year would pass, they would be fit for farming. The ground was now overgrown with weeds and brambles, but Anton knew it would require but a short time and but little labor to cultivate it, and make it once more fertile. At some distance from the cottage, in a clearing, a hill reared its dome-like head, from which resounded a mingled warbling of all kinds of singing-birds.

“A better place for bird-catching could no-

where be found in the forest," said Anton ; "and I am almost certain that my predecessor placed his snares there. Well, if I have permission given me —"

A last observant glance he cast at the hut, then bent his way homeward. Cheerfully he extended his hand to his wife, upon entering the little room, and kissed the little ones, who hung caressingly about him.

"You cannot guess where I have been, Marie," said he. "I have been to the forest, and taken a view of the hut."

"And have you decided?" she asked, earnestly.

"Yes, I have decided," he answered. "We will try it, Marie, even if the bargain be somewhat hard at first. I have considered it well. I still think the young knight is not to be depended upon; but I will so conduct myself toward him that it will be impossible for him to injure me in any way. He shall receive his tenth justly. After I fulfil all my obligations,

his ill-will can do me no harm. My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart."

"Nobly and sensibly spoken, Anton," said his wife, greatly pleased. "And now I must tell thee about aunt, who, although she so willingly received us, yet, while you were absent, said somewhat about her cottage being too narrow and small for so many, and suggested that it might perhaps be better if we suffered our children to go out among strangers, at least until God, in his great mercy, would again grant us prosperity. It pierced my very heart, although our poor old aunt is certainly right: we are too many for her little house. But a great weight has been lifted from my breast; now, as thou sayest, we can again have a little home of our own."

"Yes, yes, it shall indeed be so," answered Anton, now fully resolved. "Aunt means well, but she little knows what it would be to part from our children. No, rather would I endure the hardest fate than part from them. Cheer up! Marie. To-morrow we will go to the wood-

hut, and I will enter into terms with the young baron."

That same evening the pleasant news was communicated to their old aunt that Anton had provided another shelter for his family, and that her small cottage should no longer than that night be so heavily taxed.

"I am truly sorry that I cannot keep you," she said; "but you yourselves see it could not last any length of time. At the very worst, if nothing else offered, you could be accommodated; but if a better way opens—at all events, you know, Anton, my door would not be closed."

"I know it, aunt. You have been very kind, and I thank you sincerely," returned Anton, while he warmly pressed her hand. "The Lord is our Shepherd; we shall not want." But if the worst should come, then —"

"Think again upon thy old aunt," she interrupted. "A place of refuge, if it is but small and poor, thou shalt always find with her."

It was resolved that on the following day the entire family should remove to the wood-hut. Frederick called at an early hour the next morning, and was rejoiced at Anton's decision.

"Do not let the service cause you any uneasiness, cousin ; I will so arrange it that you shall not be burdened. The first hunt comes off late in the autumn ; and in the winter, when there is but little else for you to do, you can be on hand two or three days ; and you need give yourself no trouble about the rest of the time."

Frederick had the key of the hut with him, and offered to accompany them, which offer was accepted with pleasure ; so with bag and baggage they set forth, after taking a grateful leave of their kind benefactress.

Marie was a little startled when she saw the old hut, and the ravages time had made upon it. Nothing but weeds and brambles were to be seen within the enclosure — then the damaged roof. But Anton said, encouragingly :

"Give me only one week, Marie, and all will

be changed ; you will soon feel at home—if only no evil from without fall upon us ; but I will not fear :

‘If God be my support,
The mischief they intend me
Shall quickly come to naught.’

Will I be permitted, cousin Frederick, to place nets on yonder hill ? ”

“Certainly,” answered the huntsman. “The old herdsman had his snares there, and certain privileges belong to the cottage as a right ; only you dare not take any other game than the singing-birds.”

“I know that,” said Anton. “Rather would I cut off my right hand than be a poacher — of that you can rest assured, Frederick, and your baron also. But now unlock the door ; we must see how the old hut looks inside.”

Frederick opened the shutters, so that light and air might stream into the little house, they following, peering curiously around through the

rooms which should, for the future, afford them protection and a shelter.

“It is not in as bad a state—not nearly so bad—as I feared. There is a table, and there are chairs, all good and firm; and this room is quite large, so that we can all be seated comfortably.”

“Look at the kitchen and chamber,” said the huntsman. “To be sure, they are not in very good condition, but that Anton can soon repair.”

They explored the little house, ascending to the rooms above, and Marie’s perplexed face grew more and more serene the further she advanced. Splendid rooms they certainly were not, but, with a little trouble, could be made comfortable to live in; and there was really more space than in their desolated cottage by the Rhine. The upper rooms were considerably damaged by the leaking of the snow and rain through the decayed roof, but these defects Anton promised to remedy speedily. After a most satisfactory inspection of the hut, the unan-

imous decision was made that in the name of the Lord they would take possession of the dwelling.

The key was delivered up to Anton, by Frederick, representing the baron as proprietor, with which the contract was closed without further formalities.

“Now,” said Marie, in the evening, when they were in peaceful possession, and had sought repose — “now we have again a home: only, may our God add his blessing!”

“Amen!” responded Anton with deep emotion. “If the Lord is on our side, whom shall we fear? He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. Let us praise the Lord with all our hearts, for his merciful kindness is great toward us.”





CHAPTER IV.

DER VOGELHERD.

“With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine, by the cloud that cometh betwixt.”



NTON was not wont to fold his hands when there was work to be done; and plenty of employment was to be found in their new place of refuge. The first thing to be thought of was the repairing of the roof, much of which was in a dilapidated condition. Reeds, he knew, could be obtained without number in their immediate neighborhood; and by the use of his boat and a cart — borrowed from one of his former neighbors — he gathered them in great abundance, and before evening they had provided all that were needed; for all went bravely to work. Then the interior of the hut

was improved. Anton had brought a few necessary tools from their old home; and while he was busy with these, Marie and the children were cleaning, scouring, and washing, until all in the little cottage was in as good order as circumstances would allow.

After the repairing of the house came the cultivation of the field-land. This labor devolved almost entirely upon Anton. To plough, root out the bushes, and pull up the weeds, required more strength than the others possessed. Meanwhile, however, they were not idle. Anton, preparing for the future, procured pack-thread, with which nets were to be made for catching birds, which was easy work for the more delicate hands of the children and their mother—all the more easy, as they were accustomed to the making of fish-nets for their father to use in the pursuit of his business. Before the field was in order the nets were finished, and Anton was soon to prove whether his plan of setting up bird-snares would succeed or not.

While all this preparation and work was in progress, they necessarily endured many privations; but their hope and courage did not desert them.

“We must bear it,” said Anton and his wife, when some want was especially urgent — and they did bear it patiently. Fortunately, Anton was valued and beloved by all his neighbors, and they willingly assisted him as far as lay in their power — lending him materials and tools suitable to his purposes — even sending him seed-corn and potatoes for his field, or supplying him with food for himself and family: each one helping him willingly, saying, “Return them again, if you can; but if not, never mind.”

Anton received all that was so kindly offered, with a deeply grateful heart; resolving, at the same time, that every obligation should be honorably discharged; keeping a strict account of all he received, and from whom, so that not one of his benefactors should be forgotten. To this list he also added the gold-piece presented

by the stranger whom he rescued from the church-tower. Anton, happily, was able in a short time, with the strictest economy, to relieve his family from their most pressing wants. Marie sought to economize the groschen and kreuzer; but they would not last forever; and when she saw their resources steadily diminishing, she became more and more depressed. One evening, after a hard day's work, when Anton returned to his home, he noticed that something unusual must have occurred to discourage his light-hearted, patient wife.

"What has happened, Marie?" he affectionately asked. "Some weight rests upon thy heart and oppresses thee?"

"Yes; Anton, thou hast guessed aright," she answered, trying to restrain the tears which rose from her overburdened heart. "I must tell thee, I have to-day taken from out my little purse its last groschen."

"Then it is well," said Anton, "that I received to-day two gulden for my fish;" and well-pleased

he drew from his pocket a handful of small silver coins. "See there, Marie; now thou needst not grieve."

The poor woman cried aloud for joy. "How happens it that you received this money?" she cried. "Ah! it is still true that 'man's extremity is God's opportunity!' Thou canst not think how heavy my heart has been for the past two or three days, and now I could weep for joy."

"Yes, my wife, I saw it, and it did not take me long to think where the shoe pinched. So, night before last, while you slept, I arose softly and went down to the river. As I have no net now to cast, I set my lines — and can you conceive my joy, when I found this morning fast upon every line a fish, and among them two splendid trout, of four or five pounds' weight. Taking them to Bonn, I found ready sale, and have but now returned with the money which the fish brought me. So cast away all care, my wife. See! the house is now repaired; the fields

are sown. We have all of us toiled with all our might; and now we can do no more than pray for the blessing of the God of the harvest. Meanwhile, I can carry on my old business with my lines, until your busy fingers repair our loss. We have the bird-nets, too; and to-morrow I will set up the snares, with which we can capture the little songsters: they will be of as much value to us as the fish of the Rhine."

"What can we do with the birds?" asked Marie.

"Can you not guess? Willie will carry them about the country in little cages, and you will see that he will bring home from town and village many a kreuzer."

"But how can we make the bird-cages, Anton?"

"Out of the willows by the brook; such a cage is quickly constructed, and I will teach you and Louisa how to do it; it will not be as hard as you think. Cheer up, good wife; you know our God will be with us, as he has been in the past.

After summer comes the harvest, and with it all want and care will pass away. Let us pray earnestly that no hail-storm come and beat down the young sprouts ; but that our God ‘will make the ground soft with his showers, that he will bless the springing thereof.’ ”

“I will not neglect it,” answered Marie. “Truly my soul waiteth upon God, and is full of gratitude for all the grace and mercy with which he has regarded us in our low estate : in the Lord do I put my trust. How excellent is Thy loving kindness ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.”

Soon was her unshaken confidence most sorely tried. Scarcely had they recovered from the losses they had sustained, when another heavy cloud arose, darkening their sky, and bearing within its bosom the scathing lightning.

Six months, perhaps, had elapsed since they entered the little wood-hut, and during all that time they had never seen the young knight. Anton, for a time, indulged in somewhat gloomy

forebodings about the design of his former adversary, until at last he came to the conclusion that he had bestowed upon it unnecessary thought and care. Zealously and diligently he attended to his work; many a night he left his home for the Rhine, and taking his boat, laid out his lines in the various places where, in former times, he knew the fish abounded. Upon returning home, he scarcely allowed himself two hours' sleep, for he must away to the hill before the rising of the sun, if he would expect to secure the little warblers. Then, when he brought home his fluttering, feathered prey, again must he visit the river to see what success he may meet with there. If he was not disappointed, he must wander forth to the nearest town or village in order to sell his fish. For hours he would travel in this manner, and when at length he returned to his home, sometimes long after midday, he would eat, hastily, a few bites of the meagre noonday meal; and then sit down to help the children weave the cages, for which they had daily increased demand.

Anton was soon as skilful a bird-catcher as fisherman, and he soon discovered that his snares would yield him a better income than his fishing-lines.

Willie carried the little captives, in their neat willow cages, far and wide through the country, remaining sometimes three or four days upon his journeyings, and on his return always brought with him his purse well filled. His merchandise found ready sale, which might have been owing in a measure to the pretty, pleasant face of the little bird-fancier.

While each one labored industriously and actively, the seed which had been confided to the earth sprouted and joyously thrived, awakening the hope that they would indeed have a blessed harvest. Their sky was bright and serene, and Anton hopefully thought of the future. The former advances of his neighbors he had paid back little by little, and already had he gathered together something in reserve for the future. Their wants were but few, and the expense

attending his business was trifling. But now the thunder of the approaching storm was heard in the distance, and a dark cloud arose, whose lightning threatened to discharge itself upon their defenceless heads.

It was on a deliciously clear, mild summer morning, when Anton awakened Willie to accompany him to the hill.

“Quick, quick, little one,” he cried; “the sun will soon be up, and we must be on hand, if we would not lose the best hours of the day.”

The active boy was soon ready: scarcely five minutes had passed until he walked with his father to the hill. The sport promised to be good, the air was pure and fresh, and already the little songsters of the wood were tuning their voices for their morning song; the dew hung like brilliants upon the blades of grass, and glistened like purest pearl upon bush and tree; the sky gleamed bright and clear, and, far in the east, some soft, light clouds, tinged by the first beams of the rising sun, trembled in the purple atmosphere.

"Listen! father," said Willie, while Anton made the necessary preparations, setting the net, and placing the decoy-bird in the proper place — "listen! To-day all the birds in the neighborhood will go into the trap. Hark! how exultantly they sing: there is the shrill note of the finch; from over there resound the notes of the gay-colored cross-bill: I hear, too, the linnet, and finches without number. What a glorious capture it will be! Why, I will have to remain away a whole week, or more, until all these little warblers are sold."

"Yes, yes, Willie," answered his father; "but be careful that the towing-line does not become entangled, as happened lately, when our little captives escaped from under our very hands."

"Give yourself no uneasiness father; I have learned a lesson: you certainly were not half so much provoked at my stupidity as I was myself: the net had birds under it that are but seldom caught—even a bluebird, that is so hard to entice into the net, and for which a gentleman

in Königswinter has promised me a whole gulden if I bring him one. I could box my own ears whenever I think of it."

"You have had enough scolding from me — that will suffice for this time," answered his father, smiling; "let the unpleasant remembrance be a lesson for the future. But now I see everything is in order: let us hide ourselves, so that the little creatures may go into the net."

Slipping into the hut built of reeds and leaves, which stood near the snare, among the bushes, they each placed themselves at a loop-hole, and listened and looked with intense anxiety; while here and there, now clear and shrill, now flute-like, now blithely, resounded the notes of the many-colored birds. The melody sounded nearer and nearer; the decoy-bird called and sang, and it was not long until the whole throng of little feathered singers was gathered around the snare, and, warbling merrily, fluttered down from nearest bush and tree. But, although the tempter in the net enticed, although Anton had strewn the

dainty feed, and effectually concealed the nets, yet the coy wildlings seemed to have some presentiment of threatening danger, and it was some time before one of them ventured to peck at the offered dainties.

At length a splendid finch flew near. With one bold spring he darted from the bough, and seated himself in the midst of the tempting food. At first he appeared to be frightened at his own boldness, for, stretching his neck, he looked timidly around, not touching the grain, and seeming as though he would the next moment abruptly take his flight; but when all was quiet, and he saw not the slightest cause for suspicion, he took fresh courage. His bold pink! pink! resounded anew, and he even dared to crush the hemp-seed which he pecked from the richly spread board; and then raising again his little blue head and peering anxiously around, as though punishment would certainly follow such extreme audacity; but neither hearing nor seeing anything to alarm him, again calling,

shrill and clear, his pink ! pink ! he set to afresh, and ate as though he would never be satisfied.

His example inspired his comrades with courage, who, perched upon the branches around, had been for some time observing him ; or perhaps envy banished fear, lest the forward finch should gobble up all the dainties if they did not, without further delay, come to some conclusion. The twittering and chirping suddenly redoubled, and, lo ! two — four — six lively fellows, finches, and a coy little linnet from a neighboring spray, pecked and ate as greedily as their audacious predecessor.

“Now we have them, father,” whispered Willie, softly ; “all is going well !”

“Hist ! hist ! not so loud !” returned Anton, “or you will see they will fly away !”

At that very moment their suspicion seemed to be aroused : the timid linnet raised its head from the ground, and the finches were in the act of taking flight, when they saw the greedy little green-finch quite undisturbed, and changed their

minds. A warning look from his father reminded Willie that he should keep perfectly still, and he was smart enough now to understand a look. Nodding, he stood immovable as a stone; his eye only appeared to have life; it brightened, and sparkled, and flashed with joy, as he saw the little feathered choir around sang still louder and bolder, and that one bird after another suffered itself to be enticed into partaking of the dangerous meal. Cross-bills, with their bright red and green plumage, flew up; starlings pecked and pushed to gain a place, and a magnificent bullfinch mingled with the motley winged throng. The yellow-hammer, thistlefinch, linnet, and many another flocked to the spot, falling greedily upon the bait. And now Willie was almost afraid to breathe; for now came not only one, but two of those long-coveted bluebirds, swinging aloft upon a slender spray close to the snare, stretching their necks and looking around, hopping now near, now away, casting ever a longing look at the tempting

worms in the box, which Willie had placed there expressly for just such treasures. But, although the delicious morsel enticed alluringly, the bluebirds still hesitated — perhaps one of them had been entangled in the net some days before, when it escaped through Willie's indiscretion, and, as says the proverb, "The burnt child dreads the fire." The bluebirds lingered and longed — they might so easily swallow the dainty morsel, and yet not lose their liberty. But while this consultation lasted, a bold nightingale pounced upon a rich worm, then upon a second, and then a third, until, overcome with greediness, he gobbled up a fourth, and even a fifth. That was a little too much for the bluebirds — envy overcame their fear. Gently fluttering came one, the other holding back, still undecided; then — presto! both were seated in the box, and the worms fared no better than the hemp-seed, disappearing with astonishing rapidity within the slender bills of the gormandizing little robbers.

“Now!” said his father by a look to Willie; and, trembling with excitement, the boy seized the line—the draw was successful, and, shouting aloud for joy, Willie threw himself upon his father’s breast and exultingly threw his arm about his neck.

“Caught! they are ours!—the bluebirds and the nightingale too! That was a lucky draw, father,” he cried; “they are worth at least ten or twelve gulden!”

“I think so,” returned the father, well pleased. “Mother will be highly delighted when we take home such rare booty. But now calm yourself, Willie; we must dispose of our precious captives. Quick! bring me the cages, so that the little creatures do not strangle themselves in the net.”

Joyfully Willie obeyed, while Anton freed one bird after another. The precious bluebirds and the nightingale he prudently took out first, so that they should not again escape, placing them in the little cages prepared for them, which

the boy quickly covered with a large linen cloth, lest the little timid creatures should injure themselves in their efforts to escape. So great was the draw, that more than one bird had to be placed in a cage. When all was secure, and Anton was now arranging his net to take it with them, suddenly there sounded upon the sod the quick tramp of hoofs, and the next moment the young baron, in a rich gold-braided hunting-coat, and mounted, appeared upon the brow of the hill. Anton shrank a little at this unexpected encounter; but, taking off his hat, courteously bowed. The greeting was not returned, but, casting upon Anton a half-threatening, half-malicious look —

“Hallo!” he cried, harshly; “what does this mean? I cannot believe, fisher Anton, that you carry on poaching in my forest!”

“Oh, no! sir knight,” answered Anton, with a frank, open look; “Willie and I have only taken a few singing-birds in my net.”

“In your net!” cried the knight. “And how

dare you set up nets upon my premises without my permission? Do you know, fellow, that for this offence I could cast you into prison?"

Anton's brow, at these offensive words, flushed deeply; he felt that he did not deserve such treatment, and it distressed and pained as well as angered him. Controlling his words until the young baron had concluded, he answered calmly: "If I have done wrong, my lord, it has not been intentionally. When you were so kind as to offer us the use of the little log-hut, I asked your huntsman if I would be allowed to capture singing-birds; and his answer was that the baron would have no objection; because my predecessor, the old herdsman, had on this very same spot his snares."

"The old herdsman was a faithful servant of my father and grandfather, to whom one might well show a little favor," returned the baron Ottfried, in the same harsh tone. "But who are you? What service have you rendered our house, that you should have this privilege, if it

comes to a question of right? I know of none! I only know that you are a bold, shameless scoundrel, whom I, for his theft—for that, and nothing else is your capture, as you call it—should well polish with my riding-whip. The birds here in the forest belong to me. Do you understand me, fellow?”

Anton grew pale. “My lord baron,” said he, greatly agitated, not through fear, but indignation, “you go too far! I will not suffer myself to be insulted, if I am your servant and bondsman. Your house, it is true, I occupy; but I do not live there free—for its use I must fulfil certain obligations, which I will do when the proper time comes: besides, if I have done wrong in erecting these snares, it gives you no right to call me a thief or a scoundrel, or to threaten to beat me: I advise you not to attempt the latter, for I fear neither you nor your whip. If I have committed a crime, complain of me, and I will answer before the justice; but beyond that—no other injury.”

The baron laughed derisively. "Complain! complain of a rogue like you! what good would that do? No, fellow; nothing of that sort. You have no right to catch birds in this wood, and I command you to carry to my castle those you have already caught — every one. Do you understand? Away with that cloth! I would see what fortune has given me to-day, and whether it does not hide something that savors still more of poaching than yellow-hammers and robins!"

Willie, with tears in his eyes, looked inquiringly at his father. "Take off the covering, my boy," said he with composure. "I fear the young knight has the right; although it is hard to deny to us that which is granted to every herdsboy peasant — the privilege of carrying off a few singing-birds; but we must obey, Willie: uncover them!"

The boy now drew the cloth aside. "Quite a pretty capture," said the baron, maliciously; "it is worth almost as much as a ten-pound salmon-trout! Eh, Anton: what do you think?"

“I think, sir knight, it is not magnanimous to insult an unfortunate man! I see you would revenge yourself upon me for the trout I refused to carry to your kitchen. Well, if it be your pleasure, I must bear it—I can maintain my family without the birds; you can take them, my lord! but believe me, I do not envy you the feelings with which you stand before me, a poor man! Come, Willie; give the birds to his grace.”

“Not there!” cried Baron Ottfried, angrily. “Come near, you boy! now open all the cages, and let the birds fly out; all but the two bluebirds which I see among the others—I have been wishing for one for a long time—and, without any further hesitation, carry them up to the castle! Look to yourself, if they escape; as for the rest, let them fly.”

Willie broke out into a loud cry: the poor boy's heart was almost broken over the loss of his bluebirds, whose capture, such a short time before, had made him so happy; and he could

scarcely persuade himself to obey the command, and with his own hand open the cages to set them free. His father felt for the poor child the tenderest sympathy.

“Let it alone, Willie,” said he. “I see it is too hard for you. I will obey the baron’s command;” and himself opening the cages, he set the little captives free. Chirping lustily, they rose in the air, while, with bitter tears, Willie with his eye followed their flight.

“But the bluebirds, my lord!” sobbed the poor child. “Ah! I pray you, only let me keep the bluebirds! I beg, I implore your grace!”

“Up to the castle with them!” reiterated the young noble, rudely and remorselessly; and, giving his horse the spur, with a derisive laugh he galloped quickly away.

“Hush! hush! my child,” said his father, stroking pityingly the pale cheek of the sobbing boy. “If we dare not keep these, we can soon catch another pair: there are more forests and woods around than the baron’s; it will take

us but an hour or two more to reach a new hunting-ground: it is not such a great misfortune; we will only have to rise a little earlier, that is all. Do not cry and sob so, Willie; but carry the birds quietly up to the castle, as you were told to do!"

"But it is too bad, too shamefully bad, father," cried Willie, still sobbing bitterly. "A poor boy like me! not to allow me the pleasure of the promised reward. Oh! how bad and hard-hearted he is."

"Let him be, my child," answered his father. "What great evil has he done you? taken away a few birds; about such a trifle one should not be angry and use harsh words: so carry the birds to the castle, and when you get back we will determine where we will set our nets for the future. Cheer up, Willie, dry your tears! there are more bluebirds than these in the world!"

The boy tried to force back the bitter tears, and taking up the cage, he set out on his sorrow-

ful errand; while Anton thoughtfully and with a troubled heart returned to his cottage.

“Thou wilt see, Marie,” said he to his wife, after he had related to her the occurrence—“Thou wilt see this is only the beginning of his ill-will. The young knight seeks revenge, and will not be satisfied until he has accomplished all that he designed before I took this cottage.”

Marie sought to remove these forebodings of her husband, with but little success however; for her own heart was heavy and sad. For some time they sat silent, each thinking over the events of the day, the presentiment of coming evil pressing heavily upon their hearts.





CHAPTER V.

BEARDING THE LION IN HIS DEN.

“Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.”

ANTON,” said poor Marie to her husband the next morning, after she had sent the children out into the wood, and could talk with him undisturbed, “yesterday’s occurrence at the hill would not suffer me to rest: I did not sleep half the night; I could only think, and something presented itself to me that it may be well for us to try.”

“What is it, good wife?” questioned Anton.

“You know, husband,” continued Marie, “this wood-hut has never really seemed like home to any of us: how would it be were we to leave it, and go to our own dear cottage by the Rhine?”

“That would be pleasant indeed,” answered Anton smiling; “but you forget it will have to be built up again from its very foundation, and that nothing can be done without money.”

“No, I have not forgotten, and I have a proposition to make about that very thing. How much money would be needed to enable us to rebuild it?”

“A large amount, Marie: it could not be done under three or four hundred gulden.”

“What if I could furnish you with five hundred Anton?”

“Oh! now I see what you propose to do,” said her husband, with a smile. “You will go to the old baron, and demand the money that he borrowed from your father so long ago: that would accomplish nothing, Marie; and it is the wiser course for us at present not to attempt it.”

“Wise or not wise, Anton,” interrupted Marie, eagerly, “it is apparent to me the young baron does not favor us, and will endeavor to give us

all the trouble he possibly can: it matters but little, I think, if we anger him a little more. My demand is not unjust: the baron owes the money, and he will either have to pay or deny before the justice that he ever received it. Perhaps when he sees we are in earnest, he will feel ashamed of his conduct, and will dread the scandal among the villagers, and so in this way be induced to discharge his debt. Only think, Anton, what a happiness that would be!"

"Great happiness! yes, much, too much for me even to hope for," returned Anton. "How will it be if he be not ashamed, nor will fear the hard talk of those around him, and should represent us as impostors, who wish to swindle him out of some money? how then, Marie?"

"That could not injure us," she answered; "no one will believe that we are impostors; our neighbors know us too well: at the worst, they will only think we have been mistaken."

"So be it, Marie: but, if the justice refuse to hear our complaint, I do not dare to think of

what the baron may inflict upon us. In the first place, he would not allow us to remain here."

"Not if he dare take the hut from us; but that is not so easily done, Anton: we have taken the cottage on lease for a year, and before that length of time he cannot put us out: there is certainly law in the land, Anton."

"That may be. This much is clear to me, Marie, that he would persecute us to the bitter end; and a wicked man can do much harm."

"What harm, Anton, can he possibly do? you are upright and honest — you discharge all your obligations: he would have to seek a long time before he finds you guilty of any wrong deed; so he will not be able to gratify his malice, even if he ever wish to. Honesty is a good shield, a sure protection against all the assaults of the evil-minded. We are not the baron's serfs, Anton; we only live under his lease, and if we pay him his rent in money or work, he is bound to leave us in peace. No, no, Anton; do not attempt to persuade me to give up my plan. I

will go up to the castle, and speak to the old lord freely and openly, and if he denies the debt, I know where the justice lives ; but do not think there will be any necessity to complain to him. I know for a certainty that our claim is just, and all will be right, if only the old baron is convinced that we are at last in earnest. And will we not all rejoice when we can again return to our own little cottage, where we passed so many, many happy days ? ”

Anton suffered himself to be persuaded. The tender reminiscences of those joyous times in his little fisher-cottage upon the banks of the Rhine, and, still more, the firm conviction that Marie was right, overcame his opposition, and even disposed him to entertain some faint glimmer of hope.

“ Well, then,” said he, “ if we intend to make the attempt, let us act at once : we will at least know what to expect, and no longer suffer ourselves to be disturbed by doubt, fear, and uncertainty. Let us go, Marie ; I will go with you.

And now, whatever be the result, we must, at all events, in this matter, walk in a straight path, and look well before us."

"We are surely right. I would rather go to-day than put it off until to-morrow," said Marie, decidedly. And, without further delay, they set out for the castle.

"Do you not feel some dread?" asked Anton, as they entered the court-yard.

"Not in the least," answered Marie, as, with light foot, she ascended the lofty steps, followed by her husband. Requesting to speak with his grace, they were at once conducted to him.

The baron was seated in a huge arm-chair. He was an old man, but of powerful frame, with gray hair and moustache. He was evidently suffering from an attack of the gout, for his foot was enveloped in a woollen covering. He was not in the most amiable of tempers, for he rudely bade them enter, and cast upon them a dark, scowling look.

"What brings you here?" he cried, in a rough

voice. "Your young one howled enough yesterday, and now you come to beg for the birds which my son took from you. But you may spare yourselves the trouble of any further words on the subject. I approve of what my son has done. To set up nets in my forest, I will, under no circumstances, permit. Now you have received your answer, and may go!"

"We have not come for that, gracious sir," Marie returned, in reply to this harsh speech.

"What then do you want?" inquired the old knight. "What more have I to do with you people? Make whatever you have to say short, for I am not in the mood to listen patiently to your stupid babbling now! What do you want?"

"Only to remind my lord of the five hundred gulden which his grace borrowed so long ago from my father, the school-master of Emmenbach," answered Marie, courageously.

A dark flush overspread the face of the old baron — produced either through shame or wrath

—and, stamping vehemently upon the floor with the crutch which stood beside his arm-chair, he cried: “Has the woman taken leave of her senses? Five hundred gulden, you say! and I have borrowed them? You are mad! mad! mad!”

“Pardon me, my lord; I am not mad,” returned Marie, calmly, and without being the least intimidated. “I remember perfectly, when I was a child, of my father’s counting out upon the table, in our house, the bright crown-pieces, which he then gave to my lord, you giving for them, in return, a bond. I can see it as plain as though it happened but yesterday; and, besides, my father, upon his death-bed, said your grace had not paid back the loan; and now I pray — because we are in pressing need — that you would have the goodness —”

“Silence! woman,” interrupted the baron, again beating passionately with his crutch upon the floor; “there is the door! Away, with your insolence, lest I forget myself, and cast you out

from my service, and set the very hounds in the yard upon you! Such unparalleled audacity! Out with you! away with you! Well is it for you that my son Ottfried is not here; he would make short work with you. Be off, I say, at once!"

Marie hesitated not, neither did she show the slightest fear. "In the presence of your son — of the whole world, I would reiterate that your grace borrowed of my father five hundred gulden, and has not paid them back even to this present day," she said, with composure. "Be not angry, my lord. What I assert is the truth. You know it to be the truth, and the truth should ever be listened to with calmness. I again beg of you that you will pay me the money, and I will not even mention the interest. If your grace denies my statement altogether, we have waited long enough, and will see if the judge will not help us to recover what belongs to us."

The old baron roared in his wrath. Had his

disabled condition permitted, he would have sprung up and laid violent hands upon the brave young frau ; but he was obliged to content himself with giving vent to his fury—in pouring out upon Marie and her husband wicked threats and violent menaces.

At last, Anton thought it was his turn to speak, and advanced fearlessly in front of the enraged baron.

“There has been abuse enough, sir knight,” he said, in a firm voice. “If we are poor, that gives you no right to threaten or insult us. You have heard the demand of my wife, and you are aware that she is an upright, God-fearing woman, who will not ask for that to which she has no right, and that she has asserted nothing but the truth. Give us a short and final answer, sir baron. Do you acknowledge the debt, or not?”

“No, no, no ! a thousand times no !” cried the baron, and his dark, red face assumed a purple hue, through the fearful rage that convulsed him. “If I borrowed the money from the old fellow,

the school-master, where is the bond? The woman said herself that I gave her father a bond. Where is it? If you had ever had one, you would long since have presented it. If you have none, all your babbling is as nothing. 'Tis a shameless lie! You are impostors, who try this method to extort money from me; but you have tried the wrong man. I know how to deal with people of your stamp. Now, for the last time, go! or I will have you turned out."

"We are going, sir knight," returned Marie. "If you deny this debt on your conscience, and before my face, so be it; but we will see if you will not think better of it in presence of the justice. Farewell, my lord. We go, but from here straight to the magistrate's."

"Go to the hangman! for all that I care," shouted the baron after her.

Marie calmly took the arm of her husband and departed.

"I was firmly convinced that this would be the result, Marie," said Anton. "He is a wicked,

malignant old man; and you will find out that from this time he will oppress us all the more heavily; but let our motto ever be, 'Honor God, do justly, and fear no man.' I do not regret our coming; for now I feel firmly persuaded that he knew the truth of thy whole story. If it were not so, why then the passion and the vehement wrath of the old baron? I saw how the color rushed to his face when you first mentioned the loan; that was the consciousness of guilt. Only have patience: all will be brought to light in the right time, as the apple falls from the tree when it is ripe. You acted bravely before the fierce old baron: it both gratified and surprised me, Marie!"

"Why should I fear before him?" she returned. "I knew my cause was just, and, besides, wast not thou with me? But, come, Anton; our next visit must be to the magistrate's." The office was not far from the castle, and a walk of a few minutes, after descending the hill, brought them to the spot. The judge suffered them to enter at

once, and kindly asked what they desired. Marie related in clear and concise language the transaction, and described the interview which they just had with the baron. The justice, fortunately, was a brave, honest man, who administered the law without distinction of person; he listened attentively, but, when she ended, shook his head dubiously. "The baron altogether denies the debt?" said he.

"He does, Herr," answered Marie.

"And you have no bond or any proof to bring that he really received the money?"

"None, Herr, but that I was present when the baron put the money in his pocket."

"That would not help us much, even though I were convinced of the correctness of your statement—which I certainly am. Marie, why have you not attended to the case before this? Now years have elapsed, and if we can bring no proof, he will deny it again, or will insist that the money has all been paid back long ago. I can give you but little hope, if you are unable to bring the bond."

“If I only knew where it was!” she said, musingly. “That it is in existence, I do not for one moment doubt. Where can it be hidden? I have repeatedly searched for it, but in vain! and now, when the inundation has swept all away, there is but little prospect of our ever finding it.”

“We then must try conciliatory measures with the baron: I will talk with him to-day, and in the morning you can come and hear the result of the interview. As it looks to me now, I have but little hope of a favorable conclusion. I will do what I can, however; for I know that you, Marie, are a good, upright woman, in whom I can place confidence. God be with you, and let me see you again to-morrow.”

With intense anxiety, doubt, and solicitude, Anton and his wife waited for the coming morrow, and Marie was obliged to confess that she had passed even a more restless night than the preceding. Sadly did she learn that her forebodings had not been without foundation; for

when she at noon called at the magistrate's office, she received the sorrowful intelligence that the baron had positively denied having any knowledge of a debt owing the school-master or his daughter.

"I would advise you to say no more about it, Marie," said the judge. "If you would issue a formal complaint against the baron, it would cost you much, and you would gain nothing by your complaint; and your peace of mind, too, would be greatly disturbed—for you can bring no proof against the baron. 'Daily, injustice is done, and too often might is the right of the strongest;' but if your cause is just, and I believe it is, the day will come, even though long delayed, when Heaven will certainly restore to you this that has so unjustly been withheld."

With heavy heart Marie left the office; sorrowfully she returned to her cottage. Anton refrained from questioning her; he read only too plainly the answer in her troubled face.

"Our hope then has been in vain," said he.

“Grieve not over it, Marie! we have lived without the five hundred gulden thus far; and our God, who has always helped us, will help us to the end! ‘Trust ye in the Lord forever.’ Our Redeemer is mighty; he will plead our cause.”

Anton rested not until he had soothed and comforted the sad heart of his wife, and then, as if nothing unusual had occurred, attended to his accustomed duties.





CHAPTER VI.

PERSECUTION.

"I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon :
thou hast seen my wrong ; judge thou my cause."



WHEN Anton expressed the fear that he would now be exposed to the remorseless revenge of the baron, he was not mistaken. Meanwhile a week passed without his seeing the young knight, and it almost appeared as if he intended troubling himself no more about the poor inmates of the log hut.

"It is easily seen that he does not intend to harm us," said Anton to his wife. "He who does no evil need fear none. Be tranquil and fear not."

"I fear not," she answered : "I am only grieved for our Willie. Since the baron took away from him the bluebirds, and denied to us the priv-

ilege of the snares, he creeps around so despondingly, and frets continually that he can no longer earn for us a few groschen."

"I am glad that thou hast reminded me of it," said Anton. "I have never thought since about setting up my nets in another forest. I have been so very busy that I entirely forgot my promise to the poor boy. I will at once go to the Herr Oberförster, and ask permission to catch a few singing-birds in the royal forest; and I feel sure it will not be refused."

Anton was soon upon his way. About noon he returned well pleased, and reported that all the arrangements were satisfactorily settled—a huntsman had pointed out to him two suitable places, and permission had been given him to set up his snares whenever he pleased. Willie shouted for joy at the pleasant news, and gave his father no rest until he promised he would, that same afternoon, go with him to the forest, so as to make some necessary preparations for the morrow. Anton willingly gratified the de-

lighted boy; then, too, it was a pleasure to him to see such a resource opened again: it furnished for the housekeeping many a bright gulden; and every one they could earn had its use. The nets were put in order, and the dawn of the next day found Willie and his father in the king's forest, engaged in their old occupation. Even though they were unable to entice into the net, at first, the anxiously desired bluebirds, or some other rare songster, they could always count upon a good capture, and Willie was satisfied that they dared again set up their nets. The only objection was the great distance of the forest from the little log hut. It was not always convenient for Anton to accompany him, as his fishing required so much of his time.

"You must often go alone, Willie," said his father. "I hope you are not afraid."

The boy knew no fear. "It will be a little lonesome, father," he answered; "that is all. I think I can attend to it. I understand a good deal about the business, and hope soon to be

expert. If you have to spend half the night upon the river in your boat, I think you certainly ought to take a few hours' sleep. When your work ends, mine will begin. Then there will be no cessation ; and where there is work there are wages."

This plan was now decided upon: Anton could carry on the fishing as before the inundation, for the busy fingers of Marie and Louisa had meanwhile repaired the loss of their nets, and by the aid of these Anton could earn considerably more than with the lines alone. Willie applied himself zealously to the bird-catching, which was not without success. After a few days, he was able to wander again through town and village with his little feathered songsters ; and not more than a week had elapsed when another bluebird was caught, and joyfully taken home, to be carried, the next day, to the gentleman who had bespoken it in Königswinter. All was apparently quiet and peaceful as before, and the threatening cloud whose first flash had

almost blinded, for a time, the dwellers in the log hut, seemed to have vanished. Tranquilly and evenly their days passed away, they dreaming not of evil — when suddenly a new storm broke upon the heads of the unsuspecting family — this time with heavy, stern, and unrelenting fury.

One day, Willie returned from the forest, beaming with joy, and brought with him — not, as usual, the little songsters — but a live fawn in his arms, which he triumphantly exhibited to his mother.

“Where did this come from?” questioned Marie, much more frightened than rejoiced. “How did you come by the deer, Willie? I hope you did not catch it?”

“Yes, certainly I caught it, mother,” answered the boy; “not upon the baron’s ground and premises, but within the hunting circuit of Herr Oberförster. The poor little creature had fallen into a deep ditch, and might have been dashed to pieces. Fortunately I had not yet touched my

breakfast. I jumped down into the ditch, and soon rescued the poor, pretty little thing from its pitiable situation, and fed him with the bread and milk you had given me this morning. The pretty animal was not at all timid or frightened, but ate out of my hand with the greatest eagerness. When it was fully satisfied, it allowed me to take it in my arms, and did not even once make an effort to escape. I hardly knew what I ought to do with it, when I had, with some trouble, climbed out of the ditch; but it occurred to me that the very best thing I could do would be to take it to Herr Oberförster, and tell him all about it. I did so; and when I had told him how it happened, he clapped me upon my shoulder, and praised me for having acted so honorably as to bring it to him at once. ‘You can keep the young deer, if you wish,’ said he. ‘It has lost its mother, and would only perish if we were to set it free. Take it with you to your home, if it will afford you any amusement.’ The present was so great, I could not at

first believe that he was in earnest," continued Willie; "and when he assured me that I could take the fawn along with me, I shouted aloud for joy, thanking him as heartily as I could, and then sprang as fast as it was possible through the wood to our hut, because I knew you too, mother, would be glad to have the lovely little animal. Only see how charming it is! What a soft skin, and what large, beautiful, soft eyes it has! I can let it play around the yard, can't I, mother?"

"Yes, that thou canst," said Frau Marie. "It is certainly a darling little creature, and so tame! Father, too, will be glad it was given to you; for plenty of food can be found for it here in the forest."

Willie and little Anna were made perfectly happy by the possession of the fawn. They took it into the little enclosure, which was fenced off from their garden, and let it leap and frolic about as it would; and, although it was lively and brisk, yet it was so confiding that it would

eat out of their hands. In the exuberance of their joy, they did not observe the young baron pass by, and, in doing so, cast a spying glance over the lattice. As he saw the deer, he smiled maliciously, but rode on without a word, after having, for a short time, watched the children at their sport. No one had noticed him but Louisa ; and his appearance was a matter of such indifference to her that she had not even thought of mentioning that she had seen him.

Soon after midday, having disposed of his fish, Anton returned to his home ; and was at once led to the fawn by Willie, who related to him how it came to be in his possession.

“As Herr Oberförster has given it to you, certainly you can keep it,” said his father, while he gazed with sincere pleasure upon the charming little creature. “I must not neglect asking him to mention the circumstance to our baron ; it might look as though we had come into possession of the deer in a dishonest manner, which

might be followed with some evil result. Our baron is not to be trusted, and therefore we must be prudent."

It was unfortunate that Louisa did not hear these words, or she certainly would have mentioned that the young knight had passed, and had observed the children playing with the deer.

Anton, hearing nothing of all this, postponed until the next day the calling upon the high-forester, seeing no necessity for such haste; but bitterly had he cause to regret his neglect.

It was evening, and the happy little family sought repose with hearts free from care, and dreamed not of coming ill; when suddenly, toward midnight, they were aroused out of their peaceful slumbers by a heavy continuous pounding at their door. Anton sprang to the window, and saw, with astonishment, the door guarded by a little troop of officers of the law.

"What is the matter, my friends?" he inquired from his open window. "Why have you come here at this time of night?"

“To arrest you, fisher Anton!” answered the sergeant, who accompanied the officers of the law. “I am heartily sorry that I must proceed against an old acquaintance; but it is commanded, and it would be useless to refuse.”

“How? arrest me? me? Thou dost dream, good Anselm!” replied Anton. “I have broken no law!”

“There must be something wrong: my order is explicit to arrest you and your son Willie, for poaching; the young knight has entered the complaint, and himself ordered the arrest.”

“Ah! now I understand,” answered Anton; “the fawn, the poor little fawn, is the innocent cause of all this trouble! Well, Anselm, lead us forth; we go leaning upon our God; to-night thou wilt shut us up, but before to-morrow noon thou wilt release us. My Willie had a young deer presented to him by the high-forester, and that circumstance has been used for the purpose of criminating and persecuting us. Wait

a few moments, Anselm: we have to dress ourselves, and then we will be ready to go with you."

"You will not leave the house secretly?" asked the sergeant.

"Heaven forbid!" replied Anton. "No! no! I shall be glad to see the embarrassment of your baron to-morrow when confronted by the Herr Oberförster: it may teach him a lesson, to leave us for the future in peace. Wait but a moment, Anselm! we will come down."

Hastily Anton and Willie threw on their clothing. Marie, perfectly composed meanwhile with regard to the arrest, which, as she thought, could only last for a few hours, promised Anton she would send Louisa, as soon as it was light, to the forester, and make known to him how urgently they needed his assistance and protection against this arbitrary arrest of the baron.

"There is no doubt, Marie," he returned, "but that the noble Herr, as soon as he knows how pressing the need is, will at once mount his horse

and bear witness for us: be composed, my dear wife, and give yourself no uneasiness."

Marie saw, as she supposed, no occasion for fear, for she was conscious of their innocence, and parted from them quite tranquilly, expecting, without the shadow of a doubt, to see them again the next morning as cheerful and buoyant as ever.

"Here we are, Sergeant Anselm," said Anton, as he and his boy made their appearance. "You have only to order where we shall go, and you will find us obedient."

"The baron has commanded that I should lock you up in the tower," answered the sergeant.

"And the tender, innocent child, too?"

"Him too! But do not fear, Anton; we will see that you are well quartered. Come; and" — he turned to his men — "two of you bring the deer, and any birds you may find about the place, and take them to the castle."

Willie, who until now had been calm and composed, cried and sobbed when they took his little

darling; but the sergeant soothed him, saying: "Be quiet, Willie, don't distress yourself so much: if Herr Oberförster has given you the deer, they will have to return it again, and I promise you no harm shall come to the little animal."

This friendly promise gave Willie some comfort. His father, taking him by the hand, followed, without any resistance, the sergeant to the designated prison. On the way they related more fully how they had come into possession of the deer and birds, and the officer assured them that the imprisonment could not last more than a few hours.

But, alas! it ended very differently from what they expected. When Louisa hastened, upon the following morning, to Herr Oberförster's, to ask him to appear as a witness, she received the astounding information that only the day previous he had departed upon a journey for an unlimited length of time. This sorrowful news was immediately communicated to Anton, who had already

been taken before the registrar. Herr Oberförster's testimony, of itself sufficient to clear Anton and Willie from the grave charges preferred against them, was Anton's sole dependence.

"See the unblushing liar!" jeered the young knight, derisively; "he well knows that the champion he has mentioned cannot appear, and and by this means he hopes to escape. But this will not help you, fellow; the deer and the birds have been found in your cottage, and you will be sentenced as a poacher. Make the matter short, Herr Registrar! the proofs are at hand, and surely you will not listen politely to mere brazen denials." The registrar shrugged his shoulders; and, being less just and upright than the justice, to whom Baron Ottfried had prudently not applied, suffered himself to be overruled by the violence of the baron, as well as misled by the appearance of things. He pronounced summary sentence "that Anton should, until further proceedings, be confined in the dungeon, and that Willie should remain in the tower four weeks."

It availed nought that Anton appealed against the injustice of this sentence, and invoked the justice of Heaven. By the command of the baron he was dragged forcibly away; and the miserable prisoner was cast into a dungeon which was only used for the confinement of the worst class of criminals. Poor Willie, when they took him back to the tower, wept as though his heart would break, and sank sobbing upon his hard bed, beseeching God for deliverance and help in this his time of need.





CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER'S RETURN.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.”



WHILE Anton and Willie languished in prison, the mother and Louisa in the little wood-hut, upon which a dark shadow had fallen, passed the long, sorrowful hours in weeping. Their support had been withdrawn; and, at the expiration of a few days, the little store they had laid up in reserve was almost exhausted, and their need and destitution so great that they knew not how to obtain food wherewith to appease their hunger: sadly they thought of the future.

But the cup of their sorrow was not yet full: their persecutor — not content with tearing from

them their sole dependence — in order to gratify his revenge, rested not until he deprived the fatherless family of their only shelter.

Toward the close of a sorrowful evening, there came one of the baron's servants to the little hut, with imperative orders that the poor, despairing woman should leave the cottage on the following morning, adding that rogues and poachers would not be suffered to remain there any longer, and intimating that, if they did not leave at once, the bailiff would compel them.

With a heart almost paralyzed through grief and despair, Marie could scarcely believe she heard this harsh command aright. The sorely tried woman, at first, overpowered by this new misfortune, sank into the deepest dejection, then cried aloud in her bitter anguish.

“What will become of us now, Louisa? what now? there is nothing left for us, but that we take up our dwelling in the forest, and live, as do the birds of the air, under the open sky. Alas! never, never could I have conceived that

heart of man could have been so relentless as the breast of that vindictive man! Louisa, I know not what trouble may yet fall upon us."

"Weep not, mother," returned the noble-minded maiden; "thou hast ever taught me to place my trust in the Lord, and now, in this hour of trial, will I, yea, more than ever will I build upon the promises of my God: 'I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, and my fortress.' Let us not fear, mother, but rest in him, waiting patiently for him. Has he not said that he will not leave us nor forsake us? 'His mercy endureth for ever.' Can we not sing now, as in times past:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from every need
That hath us now o'ertaken.'

The Lord will provide, dear mother. I will at once go into the village, and see if I cannot get a place in some good family; and you, mother, and little Anna, can go back to our old Aunt Dorothea's: she will receive you kindly, I know;

it will only be for a short time. Father and Willie are guiltless, and as soon as Herr Oberförster returns from his journey, their innocence will be proved, and they will be released from confinement. Be comforted, dear mother; cast not away your confidence; God has always helped us, and he will help us to the end! Our necessity is great, and our hearts are bowed down with sorrow, but it is ever true 'that when the need is sorest, God's help is nearest.'"

"Alas! the Lord has turned away his face from us," answered Marie, in the depth of her despair. "Since the fearful inundation, we have known neither peace nor freedom from care. I do well to be faint-hearted, if God has withdrawn his helping hand from us."

"What God does, darling mother," replied Louisa, with beautiful confidence, "he doeth well! If the rod of sorrow seem to be suspended over our heads, who has said to us that chastisement is for our profit, not as a punishment? Are we able to fathom the thoughts of God? No, my

dear, brave mother must not now be faint-hearted, if the sunshine of heaven is hidden by clouds: the clouds pass away as a breath of air, but the sun shines ever radiant in the firmament. Suffer me to help you, dear mother: I am going to the village; in a few hours I will return, and then thou wilt see that the shadows which now darken our sky will have become less obscure."

Louisa was soon ready, and Marie with sorrow suffered her to depart. The noble girl, in her artlessness, had decided upon the best course that could have been adopted in their present situation, and resolutely she carried out her design. But two hours had passed when she returned cheerfully from the village.

"All is well, darling mother," she said; "old Martin will give me employment; and even if I earn but little, it will still be something for us. Aunt Dorothea bids thee come; she will welcome thee heartily. The whole village feels for us the kindest sympathy, and all are indignant at the tyranny of the baron. No one considers father

guilty. Cheer up, mother! God has disposed the hearts of all kindly toward us, and it cannot be long until father and Willie will be again free."

"And what then — what then, Louisa?"

"Ah!" answered the dauntless maiden: "stands it not written, 'Thou shalt take no thought for the morrow;' and still further, 'God, who feeds the young ravens, will not suffer thee to hunger.' Take courage, dear mother! after the storm, the blue heavens are infinitely more beautiful."

Marie's fainting spirit was refreshed by these comforting words. She roused herself from the stupor of her grief, and cast, with a powerful effort, the sorrow from her soul.

"Come, then, let us go, my child!" she said. "Not another night will that wicked man permit us to remain under this roof!"

Instantly preparing to leave the hut, she gathered their trifling effects, made of them a bundle, and placing their only treasure, the Bible,

on top, she tied them together, and left the wood-hut, under whose thatched roof they had passed so few happy, peaceful hours. Taking her child by the hand, and carrying her bundle with the assistance of Louisa, she took her way to the village, and was received kindly and hospitably by Aunt Dorothea. The little cottage would conveniently accommodate but two ; and Louisa declared her intention of at once entering into service at old Martin's, so as not to be an additional burden to her mother and aunt. Marie would have detained her, but her persuasions were in vain : the devoted girl went forth, fleet as the wind, bearing with her the best blessings of her mother.

A few more days passed in grief and sadness. Fisher Anton and his son remained shut up in prison ; and still no intimation of Herr Oberförster's return from his journey. Poor Marie had paid out her last kreuzer, and deeply did she grieve that she and her little Anna would now be wholly dependent upon the poor old aunt,

who, although willing to share with her all she possessed, had but little to share. On the fourth day, after a hard struggle, she almost came to the conclusion that she would go up to the castle and implore the baron to take compassion upon her husband ; although she entertained but little hope of a favorable result. Wishing to consult with Louisa before determining upon this course, and perhaps indulging the hope that the courageous girl would accompany her — for sorrow had now bowed down her brave spirit — she hastened to the farm of old Martin. Louisa soothed her sad heart with her cheering, hopeful words, and returned with her to the little cottage.

They found no one at home but little Anna — Aunt Dorothea had gone to the field. The child sat at a small table, and before her lay the Bible, in which, but a short time before, the poor, despairing mother had sought comfort and strength in her dire distress. The little one, well pleased, was gazing at the many pretty pictures the book contained. She evidently had been playing with

it for some time, for Marie saw that she had torn the cover of the precious, holy book, and had opened her mouth to reprove her—when she espied a paper, yellow with age, between the cover and the binding. With some curiosity she drew it out, cast upon it one look, and, with a loud cry, half of astonishment, half of rapture, she sank upon a chair, white and trembling, reason almost tottering through the ecstasy of her joy.

“My darling mother, what means this?” cried Louisa, greatly alarmed.

“Nothing bad,” replied Marie, as she regained her self-possession, handing her the paper at the same time. Wondrous the joy! “See: our God has guided the fingers of the child; the so long-hidden bond of the baron! My dear father confided it to the keeping of his most sacred treasure—and God has suffered us to find it through the hand of the child!”

Louisa stood wondering and amazed. “Oh! this Bible!” she exclaimed, looking up to heaven. “Rememberest thou not, mother, that was the

sole thing thou didst save from the devastation of the inundation! In guarding the heavenly treasure, thou didst obtain the earthly: truly this is God's providence, mother!"

"God's providence!" repeated Marie. "Oh! how I thank my Father in heaven, who so visibly has manifested his grace toward us! How I thank him! My soul doth magnify the Lord! Now are we saved, and even this very day will father and Willie be with us!"

"Yes, saved!" repeated a deep, rich voice from the door, which had been so softly opened that neither of them had noticed it. "At last, at last I find that for which my soul has longed for years! and now call I, come! come! that I may gather you to my heart!"

With astonishment the little family gazed upon the stately form of the stranger, who stood before them with radiant countenance and extended arms. And now Marie recognized him.

"You are the one, dear sir," she said—"you are the one whom my husband and Louisa res-

cued from the church-tower, when the inundation surprised us. You are heartily welcome! My poor Anton cannot greet you, for he languishes in the dungeon, though innocent — imprisoned, but — ”

“Who says that he is imprisoned?” returned the stranger. “See! Marie; here is thy husband, and here thy boy!”

He threw wide open the door, and both Willie and Anton rushed in. With happy, blessed tears of joy and thankfulness the long-separated ones fell into each other’s arms — and saw not how the stranger advanced toward Louisa, and, bowing down, softly whispered to the startled maiden; nor yet saw they how Louisa, white as snow, tottered back, then suddenly threw herself upon the stranger’s breast, who, with ardent love, pressed her to his heart. They heard not the cry of Louisa, nor the sweet, sweet, endearing words that trembled upon her lips, and which were returned by the stranger — until, at length, Marie released herself from the arms of her

husband, and gazed, with astonishment, upon the stranger and her foster-daughter. Raising his head, and with his arm thrown around Louisa, he asked Marie, "Dost thou not remember me?"

Marie looked at him inquiringly for a moment, then the same presentiment of some months before flashed upon her anew. "Can it — can it be possible?" she asked. "You are —"

"To my heart, sister!" he interrupted. "Yes, I am Oscar Murray, the Scot, thy brother; and this child, that you have cared for and cherished — my Louisa, the dear remembrance of my beloved wife — is my child, my daughter!"

What a reunion, filled with joy and pain, with sadness and rapture, after so long a separation! Tears were wept, many tears, sorrowful and joyous, before the deeply agitated hearts regained composure, or could listen to the explanation of this so utterly unexpected return.

Hours passed before their deep emotion was

subdued; then the wonderful discovery of the long-lost bond was told by Marie; and, as the twilight drew near and deepened, our friends all gathered together around the table in the lowly cottage, the old aunt rejoicing with them, while—the stranger no longer, but the loved father and friend—related to attentive listeners the remarkable events which had separated him, for so many years, from his loved ones.

We will, in few words, give his narration: Upon his journey to his fatherland, which he had taken for the purpose of converting his goods into money, intending after that to return, and ever dwell upon the banks of the Rhine, the vessel in which he embarked had been cast away in a storm, and taken by an Algerine pirate. He had been carried to Tunis, where he dragged out long years of servitude; and but a few months since had he been so fortunate as to save himself by flight, reaching at length his native land, and accomplishing the original object of his journey. From there he had written

to them that he would soon arrive; and it was not long until he followed the letter, which had never reached its destination. Without his having any knowledge of the fact, he had remained over night in the village where his child lived, when he was overtaken by the inundation; and his daughter it was who, by God's providence, had assisted to rescue her unknown father. He had parted from Anton in the hope of soon again returning; but a severe attack of sickness, induced, in all probability, by the circumstances accompanying the inundation, had detained him in Emmenbach, the native place of Marie. He had, during his sickness there, made inquiry about them, and received information of the death of his wife and her father; and nothing but the news of his daughter's existence was able to mitigate the pain of this sorrowful information. He heard, too, where Louisa had found a home, and that the name of her foster-father was the same as that of his rescuer.

“So then I returned to this place,” said he,

closing his narrative, "made inquiry after Anton, and heard that he languished in prison. On account of some peculiar circumstances, I knew a word from me to the baron would be sufficient to release him. That was soon accomplished, and a short explanation informed Anton of all. Asking where you had taken refuge, we were directed here; and this is how I found — deeply grateful to my God — my loved child. Your kindness and love to her makes me your everlasting debtor.

"And now about yourselves," he continued. "You are poor, Anton; poor, my dear sister. From now on —"

"Stop! stop! Oscar," eagerly interrupted Marie; "not poor — we are rich! and the old, and, for a short time, lost happiness, smiles again upon us with kindly eye. Our God, who cast us down, has again exalted us, and in a single day has restored to us blessings which we never expected to enjoy, or scarcely dared hope to find. God has done it; and as with misfor-

tunes, so with blessings—they never come alone.”

And she related the incidents of the past sorrowful days—their ejection from the wood-hut by the baron; their grief and destitution; the faithful devotion of Louisa; the wonderful finding of the bond. With clouded brow did the father of Louisa listen to this relation.

“God gives you still more than your former happiness—he gives you the power to revenge yourselves upon your enemy for every evil he has done to you. The baron is a beggar to-morrow, if I do not purchase his castle and estate; and now only one word from you, and —”

“Thou, Oscar! thou purchase the castle!” interrupted Marie. “Art thou then rich?”

“So rich, Marie,” answered he, smiling, “that I could fill all thy pockets with gold, and still buy three such castles as the baron’s, without making any very great inroad upon my means; and what is mine belongs also to the foster-parents of my beloved daughter Louisa.”

“No, no! Oscar; thou frightenest me!” cried Marie. “We need nothing. See! here is the bond! The baron can no longer deny his debt, but must ‘honorably and truly pay’ the five hundred gulden which he so long ago borrowed from my father; and after that,” she continued, turning to her husband, with a radiant countenance — “after that — Anton, is it not true? — we will rebuild our loved cottage, and live as before, in peaceful happiness, in plenty, and content!”

Anton bowed his head — he could not speak — and clasped her hand.

“But the baron! what of him? I repeat it to you, he is in my power: all his creditors have come to me to settle their claims, for I certainly entertained the design of purchasing the castle, and the baron is forced to sell; a word from you, and he, together with his son, will occupy a debtor’s prison! How shall it be? will you not revenge yourselves, when I put him in your hands!”

Marie and Anton silently gazed upon each other; both smiled and pressed each other's hands.

"You still hesitate?" said Oscar; "and this man has so persistently followed you with his malignity?"

"But thou dost forget, brother," said Marie, gently. "God has followed us with so much goodness and mercy, and has poured out upon us such rich blessings; were revenge a thank-offering for his grace and compassion? no, no, my friend!"

"But surely thou, Anton?" asked Oscar.

"I sing praises unto my God," answered Anton; "where shall I find room for bitterness, hate, and revenge? May God forgive the baron, even as I forgive him from my heart!"

"Oh! noble, upright friends," cried Oscar, deeply moved, pressing his newly found relatives to his heart, "so let it be: no revenge! only peace, joy, love, and blessedness."

"And everlasting thanks to our Father in

heaven, who has led us through darkness to light, through sorrow to joy!" spake Marie; and "Amen!" responded they all, from their deeply moved hearts.

Upon the beautiful shores of the Rhine, they live in peace and happiness—in humility and gratitude toward God. If thou shouldst inquire after them, if all is well, thou wilt surely receive the answer: "Yes, God's best blessing rests upon them! Herr Murray, Anton, and all; upright, noble people are they."

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."



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